



IRANIAN AND INDIAN  
ANALOGUES OF THE LEGEND OF  
THE HOLY GRAIL



BY THE SAME AUTHOR :

"STUDIES IN SHĀH-NĀMEH".

"CULTS AND LEGENDS OF ANCIENT  
IRAN AND CHINA".

# IRANIAN & INDIAN

Analogues of the Legend of

## THE HOLY GRAIL

By

SIR J. C. COYAJEE

*Late Principal, Presidency College, Calcutta*



BOMBAY :

D. B. TARAPOREVALA SONS & Co.

*"Treasure House of Books"*

HORNBY ROAD, FORT

398-220954  
C 839 I

CHECKED  
a

Printed by Anthony F. de Sousa  
at the Fort Printing Press,  
No. 23, Goa St., Ballard Estate, Bombay.  
Published by Sir Jehangir C. Coyajee,  
29, Ridge Road, Bombay.



ALLAMA IQBAL LIBRARY



71898

ST 01

SAV

3782

K UNIVERSITY LIB.	
K. DIVISION	
Acc No	71898
Date	5/1/70

## PREFACE

---

Many eminent scholars have emphasised the necessity of widening the mythological basis of the study of the Legend of the Holy Grail, if a solution is to be arrived at, which will explain all the aspects of the problem satisfactorily. Thus various authorities like Miss Weston, Dr. Nitze and Mr. R. S. Loomis would resort to the mysteries of Adonis, Eleusis and Samothrace for throwing light on the origins of the Legend; while other experts have suggested the possibility of Oriental influences having played an important part in its growth.

Surely, if we are to resort to ancient mysteries and cults in order to seek an explanation of the Grail Legend, then, the presumption is all in favour of Mithraism being an important source, since it had its great mysteries, and a cult which dominated for centuries those very countries of Western Europe, in which the Grail Legend was to attain its unrivalled popularity. It is also very probable that on its progress towards the West, Mithraism must have been accompanied by closely allied traditions, in particular, by the nearly related cult of the Royal Glory (*Hvarenō*) and by the *saga* of those heroes (like Kai Khusrau), who bore it. This is shown by the striking and numerous parallelisms between the Kai Khusrau



*saga* and that of Percival, as well as by the close analogies between the nature and manifestations of the Holy Grail and the Royal Glory (*Hvarenō*). Moreover, we find that not only Iranian but Indian traditions and legends can throw light on various aspects of the problem of the Legend of the Holy Grail, which have so far defied both erudition and ingenuity.

The subject-matter of this little book formed one of the six lectures on various topics relating to the *Shāhnāme*h, which I delivered as Government Research Fellow of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in the current year. My thesis is that there was a common mass of Aryan legends on the subject of the Holy Grail or Royal Glory, which has imparted a striking similarity to the Iranian traditions about the Royal Glory (contained in the *Shāhnāme*h, the *Mihir Yasht* and the *Zamyād Yasht*), to the allied Indian cults and myths and to the Legend of the Holy Grail.

J. C. COYAJEE.

# CONTENTS

---

	PAGES
1. ANALOGIES BETWEEN THE NATURE AND LEGENDS OF THE HOLY GRAIL AND THE ROYAL GLORY ( <i>HVARENŌ</i> )     ...     ...     ...     ...	6-19
Similarity of the forms and manifestations—	
(a) The Stone     ...     ...     ...	14-16
(b) The Cup     ...     ...     ...	17-18
(c) The Lance     ...     ...     ...	18-20
The “Fisher-King” in the Celtic and the Iranian legends     ...     ...     ...	22-26
The family of the Keepers of the Grail     ...	26-28
The Perceval Enfances and the legends of King Kai Khusrau’s boyhood     ...     ...	28-32
The “Aryan Expulsion and Return formula” and the Iranian epic     ...     ...	32-33
The “Vengeance Quest” in the Grail Legend and in the <i>Shāhnāme</i> h     ...     ...	33-36
The “Grail Castle” in the two <i>sagas</i> ...	36-38
Other parallels between the legends of Perceval and Kai Khusrau     ...     ...	39-42
2. CONSIDERATION OF OTHER THEORIES OF GRAIL ORIGINS:	
(a) The Ritual theory     ...     ...	43-44
Points of contact between Mithraism and the Cult of the Grail     ...     ...     ...	44-47
Mithra and Merlin     ...     ...     ...	47-51
Ideals of Mithraism and those of the Grail Saga     ...     ...     ...	52-54

	PAGE
(b) The Adonis theory and its difficulties ...	55-59
(c) Theories relating to the mysteries of Eleusis and Samothrace ...	60-62
(d) The Folk-lore theory ...	62-65
3. GEOGRAPHICAL CONTACT BETWEEN THE CELTIC AND THE IRANIAN PRIESTHOOD ...	66-68
4. THE QUEST IN THE INDO-ARYAN TEXTS :	
The Fisher-King and the "churning of the ocean" ...	68-71
The quest of Royal power and prosperity by the Devas and the Asuras ...	69-71
The "Cup" in the Vedas, in the Shāhnāmeḥ and the Grail legend ...	71-72
The importance of the element of Fire in the three legends ...	72-74
Lakshmi, Ashi and Guinevere ...	74-78
Causes of the greater development of the cult of the Royal Glory in Irān ...	78 82
5. SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GRAIL OR THE ROYAL GLORY ...	83-86

---

# THE LEGEND OF THE HOLY GRAIL: ITS IRANIAN AND INDIAN ANALOGUES

The most distinguished workers in the study of the cult of the Holy Grail are agreed as to the necessity of broadening the basis of their work, and of making full use of the Aryan legends in general—even those of a non-European character—if the problem of the origins of the Holy Grail is to be solved satisfactorily. Thus Miss Jessie L. Weston has emphasised admirably the need for going much farther than before to throw light on the problems of the Holy Grail: “If the study of the Grail Quest fall, as I hold it does, within the field of Comparative Religion, we can call to our aid scholars whose interest lies otherwise outside the fascinating, but to some minds perhaps superficial, realm of romantic literature . . . . . There may be some who, more at home than myself in those mysterious regions where pre-Christian touched with Christian belief, may be able to throw light on the most obscure passages through which the fascinating legend passed on its way to complete Christian Mystic Evolution” (cf. the preface to J. L. Weston’s ‘*The Quest of the Holy Grail*’). Dr. J. G. von Hahn (followed by Dr. Alfred Nutt) has hinted that the motifs and incidents of the Grail Quest are to be found in the folklore of the Aryan people in



general. We note also that some at least of the stories of Merlin appear to be of Oriental origin; and of course, "it is Merlin who constructs the Round Table after the model of its two predecessors; Merlin who reveals to the Knights of Arthur's court the presence of the Grail in Britain and the necessity for its quest". The presence of Oriental elements in the Arthurian cycle has been often suspected but has never yet been fully worked out. Thus, again, Prof. Sir John Rhys would connect the name of Arthur with that of the Indo-Iranian god *Aryaman* (*The Arthurian Legend*,\* pp. 44-45), nor is he averse to bringing in an occasional analogy from the Rig-Veda to illustrate his suggestions (*ib.* p. 267). Mr. R. S. Loomis would go as far as Samothrace for cults of goddesses who made contributions to the Grail Legend (*Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, pp. 285-295). Dr. Nutt has emphasised the resemblance of Greek and Irish conceptions in the matter of the Other World. Miss Weston would resort to the cult of Adonis to find the origins of the Grail Legend and would attribute to the Phœnician settlers in ancient Britain, the work of transferring the Adonis cult to that country (*Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 77-78 and 116); while Prof. Nitze champions the claims of the

---

\* It is to be noted however that if Arthur is to be connected with Aryaman he is indirectly connected with Mitra or Mithra. For Aryaman is a solar god very similar to Mithra; as Sir A. B. Keith observes, "Aryaman, who is Indo-Iranian in character, and may even be akin to the Irish ancestor *Airem*, has practically no distinctive feature save his friendly nature which makes him a parallel with Mitra" (*Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas*, p. 99).

Eleusinian mysteries and would seek the origins of the Grail Legend in that direction.

We may go here a little further and suggest that in all or most Aryan peoples, there was the idea of some great Virtue—whether individual or racial—or some “ talisman ”, which secured the blessings of spiritual sanctity, royal power and material nutrition. Thus, in the Atharva Veda, the Devas and Asuras engage in struggles for the Cow (the emblem of food), the Earth (emblem of Royalty) and the treasures of the latter. The Devas triumph in this great strife, thanks to the powerful help of Prajāpati and Agni (fire) and owing to their possession of the “ Tejas ” or Glory.

This topic can only be referred to here, since more space will be devoted to it later. As to the Greeks they have themselves supplied us with guidance on the matter by identifying the Royal Glory (*Hvarenó*) with Tyche. This idea of Tyche as controlling the fortunes of cities can be traced back to the poet Pindar. Tyche, however, became the guardian of the fortunes of city-states only as late as the fourth century before Christ (cf. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. III, 689-690), i.e. after the decline of Kingship in ancient Greece. But it is quite probable that, before the period of such decline, Tyche represented the fortune or Glory of individual Kings or States. This idea of the Royal Glory is found even beyond the Aryan races; for in China there was the idea of the “ Regulating Virtue ” of particular dynasties



which overcame the unruly elements of the State (cf Granet, *Danses et Legends de la Chine Ancienne*, pp. 117; 237; 249-251).

But the cult of the Royal or Aryan Glory received the greatest development in ancient Iran, in the *Mihir Yasht* and the *Zamyād Yasht*. There the Royal Glory (or *Hvarenó*) resides with the Yazata Mithra who may at his will grant it to kings and nations or "turn it away" (*Mihir Yasht*, s. 27). Thus the notion of the Royal Glory was made the basic idea of all political obligation, and it was in an important sense the origin of that theory of Divine Right of kings, which played such an important part in the history of Europe. That Royal Glory has, as will be shown, most of the characteristics as well of the "talismans" or "treasures" connected with the Holy Grail. The ideas of the *Mihir Yasht* and of the *Zamyād Yasht* regarding this Royal Glory were inherited by and embodied in the *Shāhnāme*h. As Prof. F. W. Buckler has shown, "Firdausi is first and last the Poet of the Kayan Glory or Grace—the *farr* or *hvarenó kavaem*" (*Supplement to the Journal of American Oriental Society*, No. 1, September, 1935, p. 18). It is submitted that in view of the undoubted prevalence of Mithraism in Europe for centuries and the popularity of the Mithraic mysteries there, *it is to Mithraism that we must turn, with confidence, to find the source of important contributions to the Grail Legend*. While in the case of the mysteries whether of Adonis, of Eleusis or of Samothrace, a great deal must be

left to imagination in order to connect them with ancient Britain, in the case of Mithraism the connection is obvious and undoubted, and the influence almost certain. Indeed, it would be strange if Mithraism which flourished so long in Britain left no traces at all on such popular and ancient legends as those of the Holy Grail and of Arthur.

Two eminent scholars—Gaster and Wesselofsky—have also claimed an Eastern origin for the Grail Legend. But they have contented themselves with tracing that source to the Alexander romance—a much later affair than the Saga of Kai Khusrau or than Mithraism—which are here assumed to be the source. Moreover these latter sources will be found to supply many more motifs of the Grail Cult than the Alexander romance can, *e.g.* the “Grail Castle” or the “Fisher-King,” as will be shown later. And in the second place, the Grail Cult contains undoubtedly some form of Initiation or Mystery which can be supplied by Mithraism in the best and highest sense, while that essential element is entirely absent in the Alexander Saga which lacks, further, the necessary religious background. Finally, it might be added that the Alexander saga was itself indebted to the legend of Kai Khusrau and to the Iranian traditions of the Royal Glory for various elements. The importance and wide influence of this Iranian tradition is only beginning to be fully recognised. For, as Prof. F. W. Buckler has observed, in the article from which we have quoted already, “in the Alexander biographies of the West—the Sikan-



darnamah—in the lives of Cyrus (the Great and the Younger)—the works of Dio Cassius, the historian, and the Augustan histories, but particularly in the Gospels, we have a western branch of the tradition whose eastern branch is represented by Firdausi's Shāhnāmeḥ."

In any case the days are gone when it could be said:—

*"Ne sont que trois matières a nul homme entendant."*

*De France et de Bretagne et de Rome la Grant."*

We have to look farther and beyond these—in fact to the whole Aryan tradition. The great epics of the world might indeed be classified according to their main *motifs*. Thus the Arthurian legend and the Shāhnāmeḥ have for their main topic the quest of the Royal Glory or the Grail. The motif of the Rāmāyana and the Iliad is "the abduction of the queen"; while "the fight between relations to a finish" forms that of the Mahābhārata and of the Niebelungenlied.

We may in any case venture to make the suggestion that a study of the Zamyād Yasht and Mihir Yasht as well as that of the Shāhnāmeḥ, and even of the epics or romances written in imitation of the Shāhnāmeḥ, will throw considerable light on the problem of the Grail Quest. We know that some of the beautiful romances on which the Shāhnāmeḥ is based were carried as far as Arabia in the seventh century. We know also how far the Pahlavi stories contained in what we know as the "Arabian Nights" have spread.

Here an attempt will be made to connect the legend of the Grail with the traditions embodied in the Iranian epic, on the one hand, and with the still earlier traditions contained in the Zamyād Yasht and in Mithraism on the other.

### SCHEME OF THE ESSAY

We shall compare the Holy Grail and the Royal Glory in the following aspects :—

- (1) The nature of the Grail and the Glory ;
- (2) the varied forms assumed by each of them ;
- (3) the character of the quest for each of them ;
- (4) the problem of the “ Fisher King ” and the lines on which it can be solved ;
- (5) the heroes of the Quest and their exploits in the Grail Castle and elsewhere.

We shall then deal with the points of contact between Mithraism and the Grail Legend, and with the parallelism between the ideals of the former and those of the Round Table. Finally, we shall briefly examine the Folk-lore theory and the attempt to find the origins of the Grail Legend in the mysteries of Adonis, of Eleusis and of Samothrace.

#### (1) THE NATURE OF THE HOLY GRAIL

We may ask, in the first place, what was that mysterious “ Talisman ” called the Holy Grail and to what does it correspond in the Old Iranian legends? We know that the Grail varies from “ a mysterious and undescribed Food-providing Object which comes and goes without visible agency ” to “ a Stone



endowed with food and life-giving properties, which also from time to time assumes the role of an *oracle* " (J. L. Weston, '*Quest of the Holy Grail*,' pp. 1-2). This rich, mysterious and automatic food-providing object, which goes and comes at will, is sometimes seen (by Gawain) as a *Cup* and also takes the shape of a *Lance*. The Grail is described as serving the guests and the Fisher King with all sorts of food (Rhys, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 314) and it has also spiritual properties. It was further "an infallible cure for all ailments and diseases, whatever their nature might be " (*ib.* p. 170).

Now the nature of the *Hvarenó* (*Khureh* or *Farr* or Glory) will be found to agree very closely with that of the Holy Grail. On this subject the best source of information—the *locus classicus* in fact—is the Zamyād Yasht, sections 53-54 and 67-69. As the latter sections say, that Glory is a mysterious quality "bringing good pastures and fine horses ; *bringing plenty* with beauty and weal ; powerful and friendly, *rich of pastures, prolific and golden.....* And there comes with it a horse's strength, there comes with it a camel's strength, there comes with it a man's strength, there comes with it the Kingly Glory ; and there is in him, so much of Kingly Glory, *as might extinguish all the non-Aryan nations*. And then (through it) living creatures (*may keep away*) *hunger and death*".

Here we may pause and see that the Glory (like the Holy Grail) is certainly a *food-providing object*

in the first instance—and something better—inasmuch as it provides welfare and strength also. As section 52 of that Yasht adds, “ Riches will cleave unto him (the possessor of the Glory), giving him full welfare, holding a shield before him, powerful, and rich of cattle and garments.” This is like the Holy Grail which also supplies food, and food of a specially rich and varied character (Weston, *op. cit.* p. 83). Moreover in the same Yasht (section 58) the Turanian King who desires to conquer and seize the Glory desires thereby to “ defile all corn and liquors ” of his hated neighbour Iran. But we note that the Glory, like the Grail is something more than a food-providing talisman and “ surrounded with an atmosphere of mysterious sanctity befitting the holiest of relics ” (Weston, p. 76). For, as section 53 of the Yasht adds, whosoever possesses the Glory “ has the gifts of an Athravan (*i.e.* of a holy priest)” and to him is granted “ illumination and fulness of knowledge.” That it fulfils the functions of an oracle and also that it assumes varied forms, which are indeed more numerous even than those of the Holy Grail, will be shown a little later. However, we may emphasise here that, like the Grail, the Glory had “ life-giving properties”. For when the Turanian King tries to seize the Glory and thus destroy Iran, he is warned that “ Ahura Mazda will come against thee, ever eager to create new creatures ” (Zamyād Yasht, section 58). It is obvious that the Turanian King was attempting to destroy Aryan prosperity and life



by conquering or forcibly seizing the Glory.

In the Zamyād Yasht the *Hvarenó* (or *farr*) is distinctly an “*object which goes and comes at will without visible agency*” like the Grail. For when the Turanian King Frangrasyān (Afrāsiyāb) “tried to seize it, the Glory escaped, the Glory fled away, the Glory changed its seat” (section 56). That idea is repeated in the same Yasht, section 82; for when “round about the seven Karshvares (continents) did that ruffian Frangrasyān rush, trying to seize the Glory”, it “escaped to hidden inlets of the sea.”

The *Hvarenō* (or Glory) goes and comes at will in another sense too, for it “cleaves” to the virtuous hero especially when he is performing some great exploit. In this way it passed from and to a great number of kings and heroes (cf. Zamyād Yasht, sections 92-95). Indeed the idea of the Royal Glory is not unconnected with that of the *Divine King*, who awaits a worthy successor during the whole of his particular reign. It is curious that hitherto the connection between the ideas of the Divine King and that of the quest of the Holy Grail has not been sufficiently emphasised. We shall enter into some details on the subject when we come to the pages on the subject of the Quest of the Grail. Here we shall only add that the Turanian King Afrāsiyāb was once the possessor of the Royal Glory; but when he lost it, he was slain by a later possessor of that Glory—King Kai Khusrau (Zamyād Yasht, sec. 93). In his *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (pp. 78-83), Mr. R. S.

Loomis has justly pointed out the importance of the famous study of the Priest of Nemi (by Sir J. Frazer) in the discussion of the Arthurian legends. In making this suggestion, he is following in the steps of Miss Weston and Dr. Nutt. It is to be added that only in the Zamyād Yasht is the idea of the Divine King followed out to its full logical completion—the Royal Glory transferring itself from one Guardian to another upto the very last days of the world when it helps in the task of the Resurrection.

THE HOLY GRAIL, THE "GLORY" AND THE  
ELEMENT OF WATER

Another topic which has not yet been fully explored is the mysterious connection of the Holy Grail with the element of Water. Such aspects of the legends as the "Fisher-King" and the turning of the Grail into a chalice or a cup indicate this connection. So also does the fact that Arthur received his sword from a hand which came out of a lake, and that on the "passing" of Arthur, his sword had to be thrown into the sea whence an arm came out to take possession of it. The connection of the Grail with Water as element is further seen when we find that the sword obtained by Parzival from the Fisher-King breaks asunder at the second blow, but that it can be mended should it be plunged in the *spring Lac* by Karnant before the day dawns (Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, p. 147). King Arthur's Avalon too is a land "over-seas," and, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, he is taken there



by Merlin and Taliessin together with a steersman, Barinthus, who is supposed to represent the *sea-god* Manawyddan (E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, pp. 218-222). He is to be cured there by Murigen—a name of which the etymology is Murigena (or *the sea-born*). We also know that it was the Lady of the Lake who carried off young Lancelot and that “the lake is mere enchantment” (*ib.* 160). This profuse utilisation of the agency of lakes and seas in the Arthur legends deserves to be emphasised.

That connection between the Glory (*Hvarenō*) and the element of Water has been rendered much more explicit in the Zamyād Yasht. There the angel of Waters (Apām Napāt, literally “the Son of the Waters”) constitutes himself a real guardian of the Glory in his watery dominion. For, as the Zamyād Yasht (sec. 51) has it, “that Glory swells up and goes to the sea Vouru-Kasha. The swift-horsed Son of the Waters (Apām Napāt) seizes it at once; this is the wish of the Son of the Waters, the swift-horsed: ‘I want to seize that Glory that cannot be forcibly seized, down to the bottom of the Sea Vouru-Kasha, in the bottom of the deep rivers’.” The connection of the Glory with the sea is obvious also because when the Turanian King attempted to seize the Glory in the sea, that Glory escaped and “an arm of the Sea Vouru-Kasha was produced” (sec. 56).

This pursuit of the Glory by “the Turanian murderer” and its escape from him happens thrice (Zamyād Yasht, §§ 56, 59, 62), and the arms of the

Sea thus produced are termed the lakes Husravah, Vanghazdau and Awzdānwa. Here is something like an identification of the Glory with the element of water. A further item in the connection of the Glory and the watery element is to be found when the Kyanian dynasty was founded on the shores of the Lake Kāsava in Seistan; and the Yasht goes on to say (sec. 66) that the Glory “cleaves unto him who grows up there where lies Lake Kāsava, along with the Haetumant river; there where stands Mount Ushidhau surrounded by waters that run from the mountain.” It would certainly appear as if the Glory loves the vicinity of waters whether of the sea, the river or the lake.

Firdausi goes further than the Yashts and asserts that it was in the power of one who possessed the Glory *to command the waters*. As a result, it formed a test or criterion of the possession of the Glory, that he who had it could cross rivers without having to resort to ships and boats. Thus when the heroes Giw and Kai Khusrau were proceeding towards Iran and found the swollen river Oxus in their way, while no boats were available, the former thus addressed his companion: “Why are you afraid of the water of the river if indeed you possess the Glory?”

چه اندیشی ارشاه ایران توئی      پناه دلیران و شیران توئی  
بید آب را کی بود بر تو راه      که با فر و برزی و زیبای گاه

Upon this Kai Khusrau and his entourage urged their horses into the raging flood and got across in



spite of the weight of the panoply and armour of men and steeds.

As Sir Gawain found out, the Holy Grail was “not of wood, nor of any manner of metal, nor was it in anywise of stone, nor of horn, nor of bone.” And yet it could assume on occasions the material shapes of a vase, a cup or a dish, a lance or even a stone. So also the Glory (*Hvarenō*) was so spiritual in character that gods and demons strove for it, and yet it assumed the shape of a cup (*Jām* in *Shāhnāme*) or of a magic stone (*Muhra* in the *Shāhnāme*). It assumed the shape of a bird (in the *Zamyād Yasht*) when it left King Yima. And it assumed the shape of an arm or an inlet of the sea to avoid the Turanian King Frangrasyān (or Afrāsiyāb) who would seize the Glory forcibly (cf. *Zamyād Yasht*, sections 56, 59, 62).

## (2) THE DIFFERENT FORMS OR MANIFESTATIONS OF THE GRAIL

### (a) *The Stone*

One form or instrumentality of the Royal Glory (the Grail) in the Iranian epic was that of an “amulet” or “stone” possessed of magical properties (سحر) which Kai Khusrau possessed. That wonderful talisman was inherited by him from remote and royal ancestors including King Jamshid who had also been the guardians of the Royal Glory. According to Firdausi, the amulet had once belonged to the Kings of antiquity—Hoshang and Tahmuras and Jamshid. For one thing it had the property of *curing men of*

*diseases and bringing them back to life even from the brink of death.* Kai Khusrau utilized it successfully to cure the warrior Gustehem of his wounds after every one else had given up hopes of his recovery :

ز هوشنگ و طهمورث و جمشید	یکی مهره بد خستگان را امید
رسیده بمیراث نزدیک شاه	ببازوش بودی همه سال و ماه
ابر بازوی گسته‌م بر بخت	بمالید بر خستگیهاش دست
اگر زنده گردد تن مرده مرد	جهاندار گسته‌م را زنده کرد

Another property of the amulet of Royal Glory (Grail) was to impart courage, energy and vigour to leaders of armies. Consequently, when Kai Khusrau led his armies for the final struggle with Afrāsiyāb, he sat in his ivory throne on the elephant carrying the amulet embodying the Royal Glory, as well as the cup which was another form of the same Glory. Moreover, in the manifesto which Kai Khusrau put forward on that occasion, the King particularly mentioned his possession of the amulet which ensured him the victory :

چو بر تخت پیل آن شه نامور	زده مهره در جام و بسته کمر
بهر نامداری و خود کامه	نوشتند بر پهلوی نامه
که فیروز کی خسرو از پشت پیل	بزد مهره و گشت گیتی چونیل

In the Arthurian legends, also, the Grail is understood to be "the source of Life". Thus the author of the *Parzival* says of the inhabitants of the Grail Castle definitively that "Sie lebent von einem

stein' (they live by a stone) and none who look upon it can die within seven days of that sight" (J. L. Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 124). Thus that author "represents the Grail not as a Vessel but as the stone of the Alchemical Quest", and that stone is none the less the Grail. This Grail was also "an infallible cure from all ailments and diseases" (Prof. Rhys, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 170). In the *Parzival* of Wolfram, the Grail "is a stone brought to earth by angels, and endowed with mysterious attributes. Thus it prolongs indefinitely the youth of all who serve it; none can die within eight days of having beheld it" (J. L. Weston, *The Legend of Sir Perceval*, p. 154).

This stone or amulet which is mentioned in the Iranian epic as securing or insuring victory can be traced back in the Avesta to the Bahrām Yasht (sections 59-60) where the worshipper of Verethraghna (the Genius of Victory) is mentioned as being in possession of such a stone. He prays to the Yazata of Victory "that I may be as constantly victorious as any one of all the Aryans; that I may smite this army, that I may smite down this army, that I may cut into pieces this army that is coming behind me." This stone possesses obviously magical powers, which are ascribed to some other objects as well, of "striking terror into an army and dispersing it." It may be added that in the Bahrām Yasht, King Kai Khusrau is mentioned with special veneration—a trilogy being formed of Kai Khusrau, Kavi Usa (Kai Kaus) and



Thraetaona (Feridun) who are singled out from amongst Iranian Kings and to whom the possession of articles possessing the magical power of securing victory is ascribed (Bahrām Yasht, sections 35-40).

(b) *The Cup*

Another form or instrumentality of the Royal Glory was that of a cup or chalice or vessel. Difficulties might be raised as to how two such different objects as the stone or amulet and the cup would embody the Royal Glory. But the same difficulty is met with in the Arthurian cycle when "two objects, so apparently different from each other as the chalice of the Eucharist and a precious stone represent precisely the same idea and are both of them the Grail" (J. L. Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 126). In the Iranian legend the cup is the جام گیتی نمای in which the whole world can be envisaged at the time of the Vernal Equinox. But of course the person, who is to contemplate in it the world, must be one who, like Kai Khusrau, is the guardian of the Royal Glory (the Grail). Indeed to such a one the magic cup will show not only the affairs of this world but those of the planets and the stars and their constellations as well :

ز ماهی بجام اندرون تابره      نگاریده پیکر بدی یکسره  
چه کیوان چه هرمنز چه بهرام و تیر      چه ماه و چه مهر و چه ناهید و پیر  
همه بودنیها بدو اندرا      بدیدی جهاندار افسونگرا

Thus Kai Khusrau could visualise through it not



only the "seven continents" but also planets like Saturn, Venus and Mars, as well as constellations like Aries and Leo. Through its instrumentality the King discovered the place of the captivity of Bezan in the land of Gurgsār in far off Turān.

We note further that the cup was utilised by King Kai Khusrau at the time of detecting the treachery of Gurgin who had betrayed the hero Bezan. That reminds us that the Holy Grail is represented also as *the cup which tested virtue in general and veracity in particular* (Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, p. 234). Thus in the *Diu Krone* as well as in the *Adventures of Cormac* we are told that the sea-god possessed a cup which tested virtues, and the same deity bestowed the cup on an earthly king. Later still, that testing cup was equated with the Grail. Mr. Loomis is of the opinion that both the Grail and the cup which tested chastity were at one time "imagined as drinking horns" like the cup of Kai Khusrau.

Moreover we shall see that the cup of the Grail also finds parallels in the "craters" or vases found on the sculptures of *Mithra Tauroctone* into which the blood of the bull that is sacrificed flows for the benefit of the whole world.

### (c) *The Lance*

With the Holy Grail is closely associated the Lance; and both in the legend of Perceval and in that of Gawain, the Lance is given a prominent place.

In fact, each hero is started on his knightly career with the present of this lance of *fer blanc*. A Christian interpretation was given in later ages to this Lance, which was then identified with one of the instruments used at the passion of Christ. In other accounts the hero, whether Balaain, Galaad (Galahad) or Arthur, is "given a sword at the outset of his career" (Loomis, *op. cit.* p. 245). The magic sword and spear always form part of the paraphernalia of the Grail Legend; and it is curious to note that "the Irish prototype of Pellean's spear was 'the venomed spear of Pezar, King of Persia. Its name is Slaughterer. In time of peace its blazing, fiery head is always kept in a great caldron of water to prevent it from burning down the King's palace; and in time of war the champion who bears it to the battlefield can perform any deed he pleases with it'" (Loomis, *op. cit.* p. 254).

Now at the beginning of the legend of King Kai Khusrau, too, the wonder-working Lance plays a great part, and that just when he is trying to demonstrate that he is the possessor of the Royal Glory and, consequently, the heir to the Guardian of the Glory or Grail. In order to prove his title to the throne and his possession of the Glory he is sent to storm the bespelled castle of the magician Bahman. He orders his trusted officer Giw to take the magic lance and to push or thrust it into the wall of the fort:

بفرمود تا گيو يا نيزه نفت      بنزد يك آن بر شده ياره رفت

چو نامه بديوار دژ در نهاد      پيام جهاندار خسرو بداد



هم ازنگه بفرمان یزدان پاک      از ان باره دژ بر آمد تراک  
یکی شهر دیداندران دژ فراخ      بر از باغ و میدان و ایوان و کاخ

The spell was immediately broken, the demons holding the castle were dispersed and a new, beautiful, and well-lighted castle appeared in its place.

### (3) THE QUEST OF THE GRAIL

In the legends of the Holy Grail a halo of sanctity always surrounds it, even though sometimes it merely "leaves rich food and drink in its train". But the idea of the sanctity and mysteriousness of the Glory is much more emphasised by the Zamyād Yasht which represents the Glory as important and sacred enough to be the object of a direct conflict between God and Satan—"for which the Good Spirit and the Evil one did struggle with one another: for that Glory that cannot be forcibly seized they flung each of them their darts most swift" (sec. 46). Long before Kings and Knights entered upon the Quest for the Glory or Grail on earth, the gods are represented as entering on a combat of Miltonic character and magnitude for it. Among these deities stands preeminent the figure of Mithra.

In the Zamyād Yasht the Glory is first found on earth in Yima the King who was also the Primal Man, but passes from him (in the form of a bird) when "he began to find delight in words of falsehood and untruth" (sec. 34). In view of what we are going to say later about the importance of the prevalence of Mithra-

ism in Europe as one of the great sources of the Grail saga, it is well to remember that as "the Glory departed from the bright Yima" it was seized by Mithra (*ib.* sec. 35). Then again, in the same Yasht, it is the angel of Fire who contends with demon Azi Dahaka for the Glory. In the Grail Cult, too, the *importance of the element of fire* is considerable. Thus in the Continuation of *Perceval* by Gaucher de Dourdan, that knight is guided to the Grail by finding a tree on which numerous candles were burning and at the approach of the night these candles and trees were changed into a chapel. The Grail is also represented as a light before which earthly lights are extinguished. In this connection, attention might be drawn to the torches held before the *Mithra Tauractone* by the Cautes and the Cautopates whom Dr. Forrer regards as but incarnations of Mithra (*Das Mithra Heiligtum von Königshofen*, p. 124). It is of interest also to note that various knights of the Round Table of Arthur—like Galaad and Boors—are clad in *red* arms since the colour of fire was specially appropriate to solar heroes (Loomis, *op. cit.* pp. 216, 217).

After the gods and demons, the quest of the Royal Glory was taken up by Iranian Kings and their Turanian opposite numbers. The Turanian King Afrāsiyāb was the guardian of the Glory once (Zamyād Yasht, 93); but he forfeited that position by his misdeeds and crimes, and sought in vain thereafter for that Glory in the waters of the ocean Vouru-Kasha. While he was



engaged in this fruitless quest, various Iranian kings of the Kayanian dynasty became the guardians of the Glory in succession. Finally, and in the last days, the Royal Glory will pass on to the group of saints and heroes to whose hands will be entrusted the great task of the Resurrection or Renovation.

#### (4) THE "FISHER-KING"

We now come to consider *a most notable and difficult topic in the Grail legends*—the "Fisher-King" who is extremely aged but is lingering on, awaiting the arrival of his grandson who is to become the guardian of the Grail in the place of the grandfather (cf. Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 16). Meanwhile the land of the old King is lying waste and he himself is maimed or is under some serious physical disability, though even then at his court the Grail manifests itself on occasions. In one version (Mannessier's) the hero has to avenge the death of a relation of the Fisher-King before the latter can be healed. By some narrators the age of the Grail-keeper Brons "is prolonged beyond all natural limits" and is made "upwards of five hundred years". In any case the Grail is very important as supplying provisions to the court of the Fisher-King (Rhys, *op. cit.* p. 314).

Now in the Shāhnāmeḥ we have *two* kings each of whom possesses in a great measure the requisite qualities of the Fisher-King as depicted in the Grail legends. Thus both King Kai Kaus of Irān and King Afrāsiyāb (Frangrasyān in the Yasht) of Turan are grandfathers of the hero—Kai Khusrau the Iranian

King—one of them being the *paternal* grandfather, while the other is the grandfather on the *maternal* side. Both are well advanced in age ; for the Iranian epic allots 150 years as the length of the reign of King Kaus. The other hero is far older, having reigned over 350 years by the time of the advent of his *grandson*. These facts about the surprising longevity of the keepers of the Royal Glory agree with the account of Robert de Borron that the age of the Grail-keeper Brons was over five hundred years. But here the resemblance between the two old kings ends and we may take up a study of their remaining characteristics separately.

Let us take up first the consideration of the claims of King Afrāsiyāb (Frangrasyān) to the title of the “Fisher-King”—for the epithet “Fisher-King” is best explained in that connection. Indeed here we have a very convincing and needful theory regarding the origin of that epithet ; for as Miss Weston remarks in her *Quest of the Holy Grail*, by the time the Perceval Grail poem was written “the real meaning of that title (“the Fisher-King”) had been forgotten” and “it was necessary to explain *tant bien que mal* the title of the ‘Fisher-King’” (*ib.* p. 47). Similarly, Dr. Nutt “thinks it simpler to believe that in the original Celtic tradition the surname of Rich Fisher *had a significance now lost*”. But it is just here that we can utilise the legends preserved in the Zamyād and Ābān Yashts to solve the mystery. Now in the Zamyād Yasht (sec. 51), the Glory that



Afrāsiyāb (Frangrasyān) wants to seize is said to be “down in the bottom of the sea Voura-Kasha, in the bottom of the deep rivers”. Again, in sections 56, 59 and 62 the same monarch “strips himself naked wishing to seize that Glory”. It is obvious that Afrāsiyāb *is fishing for that Glory* and keeps diving into the sea to seize it forcibly. But on each occasion that he does so “the Glory escaped, the Glory fled away, the Glory changed its seat and an arm was produced in the sea Vouru-Kasha”. Afrāsiyāb has thus earned some right to be called the “Fisher-King”; and this effort of his to seize the Glory which was located in the waters was a well-known affair. For in the Ābān Yasht (section 42) the same monarch prays to the goddess of waters that “I may seize hold of that Glory, that is waving in the middle of the sea Vouru-Kasha and that belongs to the Aryan people.” If we identify this Turanian King with the Fisher-King, then the Grail Castle would be the cave or “palace built underground with walls of iron and a hundred columns: its height was a thousand times a man’s size” spoken of in the Avesta. Such was the far-famed palace or Hankané (in Persian *Hang*) of Afrāsiyāb well fitted to represent the dwelling of King Brons, the Keeper of the Holy Grail. Like Brons, Afrāsiyāb “the lord of the Grail Castle is always found engaged in fishing” for the Royal Glory or Grail—seeking it in the sea Vouru-Kasha where it is hidden. We note further that, in the Galaad version, the mother of the hero of the Quest is the daughter

of the Grail King. This too is on all fours with the account in the *Shāhnāme* where the mother of King Kai Khusrau—her name was Firangis—was the daughter of King Afrāsiyāb. Finally, Afrāsiyāb is indeed to be taken as the counterpart of the Fisher-King of the Grail Legend if we accept a suggestion of Prof. Rhys. In his view, “it is highly probable that the story of Peredur (Perceval) in its original form represented *the Fisher-King and his brother as hostile to Peredur*” (*The Arthurian Legend*, p. 117). Moreover, we are told that the Rich Fisher was a *consummate wizard*—“much he knew of black art”—and he had made his court all but impossible to find. Certainly in the Iranian epic both Afrāsiyāb and his brother Karsiwaz were both mortal foes of the hero Kai Khusrau, and the former was a magician who vaunted his art and whose cave could be found only after a very long search.

The other—and even a better—candidate in the *Shāhnāme* for the position of “the Fisher-King” is Kai Kaus, the paternal grandfather of King Kai Khusrau. He too has a great many characteristics in common with the Fisher-King. It can truly be said that “he is languishing in extreme old age awaiting the arrival of his grandson who is to become the Guardian of the Grail in his stead”. The *Shāhnāme* represents Kai Kaus as a very old monarch who is prepared to part with his sovereignty to the grandson (Kai Khusrau) on the latter’s arrival; and in the event he actually did so. The Glory is to go to the *grandson*



because the son (Siyāwash) has been slain by the Turanian King. The land of Iran is *waste*, because the Turanian King has been invading and ravaging it; and to this are added the horrors of a long famine of seven years :

همه سوخت آباد بوم و درخت      بر ايرانيان بر شد اين کار سخت  
ز باران هوا خشك شد هفت سال      دگرگونه شد رنگ و برگشت حال

The whole land was suffering from such ravages and it was saved only by the arrival of the new Guardian of the Grail (or "Glory"). On his accession, Kai Khusrau soon makes the country flourishing and slays the Turanian invader. It was a voice from heaven which informed the Iranians that if they wanted these ravages to cease they should go in quest of the future possessor of the Royal Glory :

بران ابر باران نشسته سروش      بگو در ز گفتی که بکشای گوش  
بتوران یکی شهر یاری نواست      کجا نام او شاه کی خسرو است  
به ایران چو آید پی فرخش      ز چرخ آنچه پرسد رسد پاسخش

It might be noted that there is no inconsistency in calling both Kaus and Afrāsiyāb Grail-keepers since both had once possessed the *Hvarenō* and both had lost it.

#### THE FAMILY OF THE KEEPERS OF THE GRAIL

Our suggestion that King Kaus (both in the *Shāhnāme* and in *Zamyād Yasht*) corresponds to the "Fisher-King" throws light on *another Grail problem which has so far defied the ingenuity of all*

*commentators.* It has been remarked as very curious that "the Keepers are of one family"; and in the Pseudo-Gautier "Joseph prays that the Grail may remain with his descendents" (Nutt, *Studies in the Legend of the Holy Grail*, pp. 80-83; A. E. Waite, *The Holy Grail, Its Legends and Symbolism*, pp. 576-577). In order to solve this mystery, it has been imagined that the Grail-Keepers signify successive mystic adepts each of whom possesses the mystery in his turn. But a much better interpretation is found if the hypothesis here suggested meets with acceptance. For the Zamyād Yasht describes how the Royal Glory "cleaves" to eight Kings of *one family* in succession beginning with Kavi Kavāta and ending with Kavi Husravah (Kai Khusrau); and the Shāhnāmeḥ follows the Yasht. Afrāsiyāb too was a cousin of these Kings. Hence the difficulty regarding the Keepers of the Grail all belonging to one family disappears entirely, and there is no need of transforming Brons or Pelles into mystic adepts. So also all complications arising from the various versions regarding the relationship between the Grail-keeper and the achiever of the Quest (noted by Dr. Nutt, *op. cit.* pp. 83) also disappear, since Kai Khusrau was the grandson of Kai Kaus. There need be no trouble regarding the "shifts to which the later harmonisers were put in their attempt to reconcile divergent accounts". Above all, features like the "sorrow in the House of the Grail" can be explained better on the present hypothesis than on any other—the



sorrow being due to the murder of Siyāwash son of Kaus (the possessor of the Royal Glory and, hence, the “Grail-Keeper”) and the son-in-law of Afrāsiyāb.

### THE HEROES OF THE QUEST IN THE SHĀHNĀMEH

Of all Iranian Kings and heroes, it was Kai Khusrau, who was preeminently the possessor of the Glory. It “clave unto him for the righteousness of the law, for the innocence of the law, for the unconquerable power of the law, for the extermination of the enemies at one stroke” (Zamyād Yasht, sec. 74). A later section (76) adds that the Glory gave him “a dominion full of splendour, a long, long life and all boons and remedies”. Here we find the important truth emphasised at once by the Iranian epic and by the European poets of the Middle Ages that it is only a Knight *sans peur et sans reproche* who can achieve the Quest of the Grail or the Glory. The “talisman” which brought to its possessor health and prosperity, power and empire, was indeed the reward of the highest royal and knightly virtue.

### (5) “THE GREAT FOOL TALE”

The stories about the infancy and boyhood of Kai Khusrau are remarkably similar to those about Perceval *enfances*. In the legend of Perceval (as traced by Chretien de Troyes, Wolfram and others) the hero lives almost alone in the forest with his mother, subsisting mainly on the milk of goats; and yet his mother is closely related to the Grail King—being, by some accounts, his daughter (J. L. Weston, *The*



*Legend of Sir Perceval*, pp. 64-90) and, according to others, his sister. The father of Perceval has been slain—and according to some versions—treacherously, while the widow has to fly to a wood for safety. According to Chretien de Troyes the flight of the mother is due to her apprehension for the safety of her child's life. This flight has been rendered possible by the intervention of an old and unnamed person; and it is also mentioned that the widow has lost not only her husband but her lands. The child-hero shows his inclination for arms by using some "gavelots" (darts) to slay the deer. He also fashions for his own use bows and arrows with which he slays birds and stags. When Perceval is taken to the King's Court "he treats the King discourteously, does not know his own name and shows an enormous appetite." Miss Weston concludes her study of this aspect of the legend of Sir Perceval by observing that there was an original and common source of the versions of Chretien and Wolfram von Eschenbach and others which was "an extremely full and detailed form of the story".

Now it is a remarkable fact that almost all the details of the legends of Perceval's infancy are to be found in the story of the infancy of King Kai Khusrau as told by Firdausi:—

1. His father (prince Siyāwash) had been slain treacherously like the father of Perceval. The treachery was that of Karsiwaz, the brother of King Afrāsiyāb since the former, by his machinations, instigated the latter

to have the Iranian prince executed. The Italian poem of Carduino—which is an imitation of the Perceval legends—comes nearest to the Shāhnāmeḥ in asserting that the father of the hero had been killed treacherously by “Mordarette” and his brother (*ib.* p. 84). Similarly it is Afrāsiyāb and his brother Karsiwaz who slay the father of Kai Khusrau treacherously.

2. The mother of Kai Khusrau was a princess (like that of Perceval) being the daughter of King Afrāsiyāb himself.
3. In the Perceval legend, the safety of the child is due to an old man’s intervention who made the flight of the mother and the child possible. But the identity of this old man is kept vague and enigmatic. In the Shāhnāmeḥ, however, this old person is no less than Pirān Wiseh—the Vizier of King Afrāsiyāb—who dissuades the King from carrying out his idea of putting to death the mother who was *enceinte* at the time of the death of her husband. Pirān sends the boy to the shepherds of the fort Kalu to be brought up.
4. In the forest young Kai Khusrau, when he attains the seventh year, shapes a crude kind of bow and arrows for himself and starts hunting, exactly as in the Perceval

legend :

چو شد هفت ساله گو سرفراز      هنر با نژادش همی گفت راز  
 ز چوبی کمان کرد وز رود زه      ز هر سو بر افگند بر زه گره  
 ابا پر و پیکان یکی تیر کرد      بدشت اندر اهنگ بخچیر کرد

5. While in the Perceval legends the uncouth conduct of the hero at the court is ascribed to his rustic education in the forest, the Iranian epic attributes it to a deep-laid design. The Vizier—Pirān, who watched over the security of the young prince sedulously—advised him to assume the role of an idiot boy with the object of disarming the suspicions of King Afrāsiyāb. That King had been warned long ago by astrologers that his ruin would be brought about by his grandson. The mind of the conscience-stricken king was therefore always full of dark suspicions and fears. In order to disarm these suspicions, Pirān advised the young Kai Khusrau to save his life by pretending idiocy. Hence, when the boy was brought before King Afrāsiyāb, he answered all the questions put to him in the most absurd and irrelevant manner. The dialogue with its questions and irrelevant answers has almost a comic character :

*Question* :—How do you manage and keep an account of your cattle ?



*Answer* :—There is no game to be taken here, nor have I bow, arrow or armour.

*Question* :—Do you desire to proceed to the land of Irān and to join its King ?

*Answer* :—The day before a knight passed me traversing hill and forest.

*Question* :—Do you know the names of your father and mother ? What do you know about the land of Irān ?

*Answer* :—If there is a strong lion he can tear out the heart of the strongest man.

The result of this dialogue reassured Afrāsiyāb, who became secure in the thought that he had to deal only with an idiot boy, who could never threaten a king's life and kingdom ; and by this stratagem the life of Kai Khusrau was saved.

#### KAI KHUSRAU AND " THE ARYAN EXPULSION AND RETURN FORMULA "

It is when we recognise that the stories of the infancy of Perceval were formed on the pattern of those of Kai Khusrau that various difficulties relating to the *Perceval Enfances* are removed. For one thing, the extreme ignorance which Perceval shows at the King's court can hardly command our belief, regarding a knight who is soon to rise to such eminence. But the case is quite different, if it is a case of concealed knowledge and simulated ignorance (as the *Shāhnāme* emphasises). Then, again, the theory of

matriarchy has been advanced to account for Perceval's claims to his later dignities (Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, p. 100). But this hypothesis is a needless one as regards the account as given by the Iranian epic, since there the hero is the grandson of two kings—on the paternal as well as maternal side. Our suggestion also agrees with the hypothesis regarding the "Aryan Expulsion and Return formula". Perseus, Cyrus and Romulus have had the formula attached to them; but the importance of the story of Kai Khusrau as an exemplification and an origin of the idea has not been so far emphasised. It is submitted here that while Cyrus was forgotten for ages in Persia, and while there is no mention of him in the Iranian epic or histories, the adventures of Kai Khusrau and the misfortunes of his father (Siyāwash) have formed favourite subjects of Iranian minstrelsy from times immemorial. Thus the famous Sassanide minstrel Bārbad distinguished himself by his poem on "the Revenge for Siyāwash" (کین سیاوش). In fact the "Expulsion and Return formula" suits Kai Khusrau particularly well, and we may safely regard the very old traditions regarding him as the basis and origin of that formula.

(b) "THE VENGEANCE QUEST"

It can be claimed without fear of contradiction, that the most famous quest for vengeance in epic literature is that of King Kai Khusrau. His whole life was in fact a quest of vengeance for his father. That quest achieved, he was ready to depart from this

world. Moreover, he is not merely avenging his father Siyāwash but also Agriras and Nodar and other earlier victims of the cruelty of Afrāsiyāb. Even the religious literature of Iran echoes this tale of the great vendetta ; and Yasht after Yasht rings with the earnest prayer of Kai Khusrau for vengeance on Afrāsiyāb. The former traverses, in fact, the whole world to accomplish this one great task of his life. Even in the East—the land of vendettas—this particular Vengeance-quest is the unique one. For, as the Iranian epic narrates in a remarkable scene—with Rustam, Zāl and other leading warriors as witnesses—Kai Khusrau was made to swear eternal hostility to Afrāsiyāb. That scene reminds us of the oath administered to Hannibal by his father to bear eternal enmity to Rome. Kai Khusrau is made to swear by his crown and his signet, by the Sun and the Moon, by Day and Night, by his sword and his armour, by the spirit of his murdered father and that of the great King Feridun, as well as by his own life and soul, to bring about the death of Afrāsiyāb and never to conclude peace with him. It is indeed a grand and highly poetic inauguration of the Vengeance quest :

بگوئی بداد و بنخورشید و ماه	به تیغ و بمهر و به تخت و کلاه
بشمیر گردان و باداد و برد	بروز سپید و شب لاجورد
بداد فریدون و آئین و راه	بخون سیاوش بجان تو شاه
بجان و خرد باسمان و زمین	به تیغ و بگرزو بمهر و نگین



که هرگز نه پیچم سوی مهر اوی      نه بینم بخواب اندرون چهر اوی  
 بکوشم بخون پدر خواستن      دل و جان بدین کینه اراستن  
 گوا کرد دستان و رستم بران      بزرگان لشکر همه همچنان

Nor is this all. Where, out of the pages of Firdausi, shall we find such exquisite versions—not to say theory—of, and apology for the Vengeance quest—the Vendetta? Thus in one eloquent passage Firdausi describes a great vendetta as a mighty tree ever fresh and green, and the partakers in the vendetta as so many leaves of that tree—one leaf cropping up as its predecessor drops out. The death of the father is no great matter indeed so long as he leaves a son to carry on the vendetta:

چنین گفت کاین کینه باشاخ و برد      زمانه نپوشد بزنگار و گرد  
 بسان درختیست با تازه برگ      دل از خون شاهان نییچد زمرگ  
 پدر بگذرد کین بماند بجای      پسر باشد اندر و را رهنمای

In another place the poet adds that if a grandson does not seek to avenge his ancestor, that only proves that he is no better than a bastard:

نبیره که کین نیا را نجست      روا گر نژادش نباشد درست

No doubt, other old epics have descriptions of and apologies for the vendetta. Thus "the furious Acmās" observes (in the fourteenth book of the Iliad) that:

"Not unappeased he enters Pluto's gate  
 "Who leaves a brother to avenge his fate."

And Achilles thus addresses the ghost of Patroclus :

“ All hail Patroclus ! let thy honoured ghost,  
 “ Hear and rejoice on Pluto’s dreary coast ;  
 “ Behold Achilles’ promise is complete ;  
 “ The bloody Hector stretched before thy feet ”.

But in the *Shāhnāme* the “ Vengeance quest ” constitutes a feature of far greater importance than in any other epic. For the epic portion (as contrasted with the historical portion) of the *Shāhnāme* is made up of a series of vendettas ; and in fact the poem moves forward on a series of vendettas. There, we have the first vendetta pursued by Minuchehr against Tūr for the murder of Irach ; a second one pursued by Afrāsiyāb for the slaying of Tūr ; a third one undertaken and carried out by Kai Khusrau against Afrāsiyāb ; a fourth one waged by Gudarz and Bezan against Pirān and his family ; a fifth—an unsuccessful one—carried on by Afrāsiyāb to avenge the deaths of his sons Surkheh and Shideh ; a sixth one—also an unsuccessful one—undertaken by Pirān and Nestihan to avenge Homān. In fact vendettas and “ Vengeance quests ” might be said to form the very substance—the warp and the woof—of the Iranian epic.

### (c) THE GRAIL CASTLE

In the Legend of Sir Perceval, the hero proceeds from the Fisher-King with a sword, which was destined from the first to be used by him. The Knight approaches the Grail Castle. Next morning the castle has vanished and he finds himself in the

fairest flowery meadow in the world. He rides on and "comes to a castle with walls of red and white marble ; within he hears sounds of singing and music, pipe, harp and organ " (J. L. Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, pp. 133-141). He strikes the gate of the castle with his sword, an old man appears and informs him that " he stands at the gates of a Paradise which cannot be won by force or earthly prowess." But the old man also gives him a letter which " has the virtue of restoring any mad man to his senses". As Perceval returns, all the people of the land bless him, for it is through his question as to the meaning of the Lance that it has again become fertile.

Now it is worth noting that *all the elements and factors* in the above story are to be found in the story of the taking of the fort of Bahman the magician, by King Kai Khusrau. His grandfather, King Kai Kaus (whom we have identified with "the Fisher-King"), desires to ascertain whether his younger son Fariburz or his grandson Kai Khusrau is to be his true successor, and as such the possessor of the Royal Glory or Grail. Both claimants are therefore ordered to proceed to the magical fort, Bahmandezh ; and whichever of the two succeeds in capturing it is to be the successor. Fariburz—the son—gives up the enterprise at once ; and, metaphorically speaking, the *sword has broken in his hand*. Kai Khusrau, however, writes a conjuration, places it on the point of a *lance* and orders the warrior Giw to *rush with the lance on to the gate of the fort and push it into the gate* :



بشد کیو نیزه گرفته بدست      بنزدیک آن بر شده باره رفت  
هم اینکه بفرمان یزدان پاک      ازان باره دژ بر آمد تراک

The darkness of the magic fort disappeared and a *beautiful well-lighted castle appeared* instead, in which there were beautiful gardens and palaces :

و زان پس یکی روشنی بر دمید      شد ان تیرگی سر بسر نا پدید  
یکی شهر دید اندران دژ فراخ      پر از باغ و میدان و ایوان و کاخ

This would certainly appear to correspond to the second castle seen by Sir Perceval. The description given by Prof. Sir John Rhys applies very well indeed to this account of the capture of Fort Bahman by Kai Khusrau. "The visit of the solar hero has annihilated a whole landscape of enchantment in the twinkling of an eye. Balyn, with the thrust of his long lance, has undone a whole world" (*Arthurian Legend*, p. 268). The whole land, too, rejoiced that Kai Khusrau had attained to and secured the Royal Glory (Grail) and such power :

جهانی فرو مانده اندر شکفت      که کیخسرو آن فرو بالا گرفت

The *land recovered from devastation*, since a possessor of Royal Glory was now to be crowned King. For, ere this, there had been the seven years' famine of which we have spoken before. Moreover, according to the Iranian epic, the letter (handed out of the Grail Castle) which was *to cure the mad man* was very necessary ; for Fariburz (the rival of Kai Khusrau) and his chief supporter—Tūs—had behaved themselves like mad men in opposing intemperately the claim of the

hero to the throne :

تو نودر نژادی نه بیگانه پدر تند بود و تو دیوانه

As it was, when Tūs saw what success the spear and the letter of Kai Khusrau had achieved at the Castle of Bahman ("Grail Castle") he came to his senses; he was cured of his pride and hastened to apologize to Kai Khusrau. Thus we have noted how *almost all the elements of the story of Sir Perceval in Grail Castle are to be found in the Shāhnāmeh narrative which deals with the exploit of Kai Khusrau at the castle of Bahman.*

#### MANNESSIER'S CONTINUATION OF THE "PERCEVAL"

We have noted above a great many resemblances between the Perceval and Grail legends and those relating to King Kai Khusrau as given by the Shāhnāmeh. The parallelism is however even closer when we come to consider Mannessier's Continuation of the *Conte du Graal*. There Perceval has to conquer Partinal the enemy of the Fisher King and has to "avenge the death of the Fisher King's brother Goon" (cf. Rhys, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 120). This approaches very close to the account given in the Shāhnāmeh, where Kai Khusrau has to defeat the Turanian King Afrāsiyāb and to avenge (not only the death of Kai Khusrau's own father) but that of Aghri-ras (the brother of Afrāsiyāb). According to the Yashts, Kai Khusrau's "Vengeance quest" or "Feud" has for its object the avenging of these *two* persons. Both in the Shāhnāmeh and in Mannessier the "Vengeance



quest " involves world-wars of great magnitude. Again, according to Mannessier, as soon as the Fisher-King hears that the offender Partinal's head is cut off, he jumps up restored to health and strength. There is a remarkably close approach to this account in the *Shāhnāme*. There, Kai Kaus (the Fisher-King) had grown both feeble and unwise ; but after the Turanian foe has been defeated and driven to his last stronghold, he recovers his wits and gives directions to the hero Kai Khusrau, which lead finally to the capture and destruction of the Turanian King. Nor do the resemblances between Mannessier's Continuation and the *Shāhnāme* end here. For, both Kai Khusrau and Perceval are crowned Kings on the death of the old Grail King, and both have peaceful reigns. We note further that, according to this version, Perceval ultimately renounces the crown and becomes a priest, and that after his death no one has ever seen the Grail. Similarly, Kai Khusrau renounced his crown in pursuit of spiritual ambitions and at last ascended to heaven. With him disappears the equipment of the Royal Glory—the Cup and the Stone or amulet. So remarkable are these similarities between Firdausi's account of Kai Khusrau and the career of Perceval as given by Mannessier, that it would have been most interesting to know the source from which the latter drew his inspiration (Baumgartner, *Geschichte der Weltliteratur*, Vol. V, 105-106).

Another hero of the Quest for the Glory—according to the Iranian epic—is the warrior Giw (*Gevān* in



Pahlavi, and *Gaevani* in the Avesta). It is not impossible that his name survives in that of Gawain (or Walwain)—the earliest hero of the Quest of the Holy Grail. On the other hand, the difficulties in the way of deriving the French form of the name from the Welsh Gwalchmei are obvious (Chambers, *Arthur of Britain*, p. 151). It has been recognised that “Gawain is beyond all doubt the original protagonist of the Quest in its primitive, pre-Christian form.” Later on, he lost his position to knights who could play the Christian role better; but before that he figured as the earliest of Arthur’s knights—one who dominated the scene long before Perceval, Tristan or Lancelot. Now in the Iranian epic the hero Giw has also his “quests” one of them lasting seven years to search out King Kai Khusrau with his Royal Glory. This figure seven for the years of the quest is found also in the Perceval legend where the hero who was in search of the Grail was told that “the broken sword will add *seven and half years* to his quest” (J. L. Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, p. 141). In the legend of Giw’s search for Kai Khusrau for seven years, we have also a parallel to the importance of *the question* in the Perceval legend. We find that Giw when seeking for Kai Khusrau’s whereabouts in the vast territory of Turan used to put the question to any one whom he met—“Do you know where Kai Khusrau is?” Any one who answered the query in the negative was at once struck down by a single blow of the sword of Giw, lest he should carry news of Giw and of his quest to

the King of Turan :

بدو گفت کیخسرو ایدر کجاست      بیاید سخن بر کشادنت راست  
چنین داد پاسخ که نشنیده ام      خود این نام هرگز نپرسیده ام  
چو پاسخ چنین گفت آن رهنمون      بزد تیغ و انداختش سر نکون  
چنین تا بر آمد بر این هفت سال      میان سوده از تیغ و بند و دوال

But apart from this "quest for the Royal Glory" in the person of Kai Khusrau, Giw had his own "Vengeance quest" as well. For in the war with Turan more than seventy of his brothers had been killed; and it was on Giw and his son Bezan that the task of carrying out the vendetta for them fell. That vendetta was considered as accomplished only after Homān and Pirān, and their brothers Nestihan and Lahāk and Farshidward were slain. Thus in respect of both these quests, Giw was very much in the same situation as King Kai Khusrau himself.

On the other hand, the warriors Fariburz and Tūs might be termed the unsuccessful knights of the Iranian quest. They set out for the castle of Bahman (corresponding to the Grail Castle) to prove the claim of the former to the Royal Glory (or Grail). But they failed there signally. Later still, they set out on the "Vengeance conquest" as ordered by King Kai Khusrau in order to avenge on Afrāsiyāb the death of Siyāwash. Here again they fail equally signally, since they never reached the capital of Afrāsiyāb, and foolishly diverted their energies to attack the fort of prince Farud—the half brother of



Kai Khusrau. In the end they are attacked and pursued by the Turanian commander. And thus their quests both of the Glory (Grail) and of Vengeance concluded most ingloriously. Hence there are instances—and important ones too—of Knights of high royal descent returning unsuccessfully and in disgrace on account of their arrogance, incompetence and recklessness. As in the quest of the Holy Grail so in the Quest of the Royal Glory, success is the reward of humility, courage and knightly behaviour.

#### A CONSIDERATION OF OTHER THEORIES OF GRAIL ORIGINS

##### (a) THE RITUAL THEORY

Let us now see how our theory of the Iranian origins of the Holy Grail compares with various other theories on the subject, which hold the field at present. There is, for example, the Ritual theory of Miss J. L. Weston to the effect that it was the basic idea of the Holy Grail cult which was essentially a pre-Christian one, to convey the notion of initiation into the Cult of Adonis (Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 77-79). The originator of this theory attempts to show that the Grail being thus envisaged, that achievement of the Quest can restore people to health and youth and can also restore waste regions to fertility. The notion of the vessel or chalice is also supposed to be accounted for by some nature cult ; though it is admitted that "in this branch of our investigation we are treading on less well-assured ground" (*ib.* p. 84). It is emphasised that the Adonis and kindred cults were essentially life cults, their aim being to preserve



the life of the land. The old mystery institutions have various grades and the Grail might have been represented by them in triple form ; and this brings us to "the conception of the central dish of a ritual feast" which is the vessel entitled the Grail. This Vase and the Lance are then connected in this theory as phallic symbols (*ib.* p. 90). The essence of the initiation ceremony of the cult was to show the nature of regeneration and of spiritual life.

#### POINTS OF CONTACT BETWEEN MITHRAISM AND THE CULT OF THE GRAIL

It is not difficult to perceive that our theory of the origin of the Holy Grail in the Royal Glory (*Hvarenō*) of old Iran is itself a Ritual Theory, that it possesses all the merits of that Ritual Theory and solves several problems which as yet remain unsolved. In the first place, instead of merely *assuming* that the Adonis or the Eleusinian mysteries had penetrated old Britain, we can start with the historical fact that *Mithraism as a cult was well-known throughout ancient Britain*, at least wherever the Roman legions were quartered.

We note further that the cults of Mithra and of the Royal Glory were closely connected—if not indeed identical. For the Zamyād Yasht emphasises the fact that "when the Glory departed from Yima then Mithra seized that Glory" (§§ 35-36). The Royal Glory has, in the main, remained ever since in the possession of Mithra (Mihir Yasht, §§ 66-67). It is in the power of Mithra to take away the Royal Glory from nations or men "who delight in havoc", like

Afrāsiyāb and his Turanians (*ib.* s. 27). Again, in Yasht X. 16, we find Mithra regarded as “the spiritual Yazata who rides through all the Karshvares bestowing the *hvarenō* (or Royal Glory)”. Accordingly, wherever the cult of Mithraism went, the cult of the Royal Glory was sure to accompany it. Thus when Mithraism was Hellenized, the Royal Glory was translated into the designation of Tyche Basileos (*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, VIII, 754).

The points of contact between Mithraism and the cult of the Grail deserve to be carefully investigated. To begin with, let us consider the ‘talismans,’ ‘jewels’ or ‘treasures’ connected with the Grail Legend. These were (a) the Cup, vase or caldron, (b) the Sword and (c) the Lance or spear. Now, even in their decayed stage, the Mithraic monuments and coins relating to Mithra reveal all these characteristic features. The cups, vases and plates are to be found in abundance in the Mithraeums. But, apart from that, the “craters” or vases, placed under the bull sacrificed by Mithra, form a most important and general feature of the sculptures representing the Taurobolium (cf. Cumont, *Monuments figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, pp. 100-102). Cumont in his monumental work attaches great importance to these vases as representing the element of Water on the Mithraic monuments. Apart from this, the vases and crater represent the *Fons Aeterni* of life (*ib.* p. 137), which is also an important idea in the Grail Cult. Cumont would have attached even greater importance to these “craters” or “Kraters” had



he known that it is "the very word from which the word Grail is ultimately derived" (Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, p. 290).

Next to the vase or cup, stand in importance the sword or dagger and the lance. Now in every representation of the *Mithra Tauroctone*, the god carries a short sword. And on various coins Mithra is represented as bearing the sword or sabre and the lance (see Cumont, *op. cit.* pp. 184-187). On these coins, Mithra bears a lance in the left hand and a sword in the right. Moreover, in the famous sculpture of Mithra, on the Nimrud Dag, Antiochos King of Kommagene carries a lance lowered before the god as a sign of respect (Sarre, *Die Kunst des Alten Persien*, plate 56). Since so much stress has been laid in the present essay on the analogies between the Holy Grail and the Royal Glory (*Hvarenō*), it might be added that on Bactrian and Indo-Scythian coins the *Hvarenō* also is depicted as armed with a lance (Cumont, *op. cit.* p. 136 ; Gardner, *The Parthian Coinage*, p. 152, No. 29).

In his great work "*Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*", Prof. R. S. Loomis has contended that the origins of the Arthurian Romance should be traced back to the mystery cults of the Cabeiroi and Curetes, of Cybele and of Demeter. And yet his valuable work affords support at every step to our hypothesis of the influence of Mithraism on the Grail Cult. There are great difficulties in the way of believing that the "myth and ritual which may have left the shores of Samothrace and of Crete perhaps



two thousand years before " formed the origins of the Grail Cult and of the Arthurian Saga. In order to connect the myths of these Mediterranean islands and the mythico-heroic legend of Arthur, Mr. Loomis is driven to make a great assumption. " The tradition must have been guarded from the beginning to almost the end by a priestly caste, who made it their pride to convey from generation, with due allowance for embroidery and harmonizing, the essential form of their sacred heritage " (p. 354). But is there the slightest historical vestige of the existence of any such priestly caste in Western Europe in history ? Is there not, on the other hand, a complete certainty of the prevalence of Mithraic mysteries and exponents in these regions for centuries ? Nor can we keep out the influence of Manichæism, which prevailed in parts of Europe for centuries and which bore great analogies and resemblances to Mithraism.

#### MITHRA AND MERLIN

On the other hand, in that work of Mr. Loomis, there is ample material for writing a thesis on the connection between the Arthurian romance, the Grail Cult and Mithraism. To begin with, it shows the influence of Mithraism upon that portion of the Celtic pantheon which comes to the fore in the Arthurian romance. Thus Merlin is a sun-god " who knows all, does all and sees all " (Loomis, *op. cit.* pp. 136 and 239). This shows that Merlin was, like Mithra, the god with " a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes " (cf. the Mihir Yasht). Merlin again is " the Giant Herds-

man " (*ib.* p. 134) while Mithra is the "lord of wide pastures". As a herdsman, Merlin holds "a great *club* in hand". In this respect, Merlin is again like Mithra, whose weapon is "a beautiful, well-falling *club* with a thousand knots, a hundred edges" (Mihir Yasht, § 132). Merlin "from a mountain top watches the courses of the stars" (Loomis, p. 129). Even so Mithra from his seat on Mount Hara Berezaiti "surveys everything that is between the earth and the heavens" (Mihir Yasht, § 95). Merlin further confers glory on Arthur as Mithra grants it to all earthly kings. Mr. Loomis adds significantly that the transformations of Merlin are matched by the metamorphoses of Cu Roi *who is also a sun-god*. In another portion of his work, Mr. Loomis observes that Dagda is also, according to high authority, a "beautiful god of the heathen", "the Red One of Great Knowledge" and the possessor of "a *club* which could crush bones as hailstones are crushed under the hoofs of horses" (*ib.* pp. 238-239). All these constitute a very fitting description of Mithra in the Mihir Yasht. It is supplemented by the fact that Dagda was the possessor of the caldron of plenty just as Mithra on the monuments feeds animals from the "crater" into which the blood of the bull flows. In fact the very name of Merlin is reminiscent of Mihir (Mithra).

But, besides Merlin, there are other Celtic gods who are closely related to Mithra. There is, for example, the Celtic deity Merdos between whom and Mithra scholars have seen a syncretism. Again, as



regards the Celtic deity Medru, his name is supposed to be only a Celticised form of Mithra. As between Arthur and Mithra, too, there is a connection through "Airem" and Aryamana, as Prof. Sir John Rhys has suggested.

A reference might also be made to names like *Dinsul* ("Mount of the Sun") and like *Sol*—the companion of Arthur—"who could stand all day upon one foot" and who has been identified with the Sun. This *Sol* can be identified easily with *Sol Invictus* or *Mithra* (Loomis, pp. 121 and 225). Moreover, the Grail heroes, Gawain, Lancelot, Boors, Perceval and Galaad, all "may claim to be young sun-gods" (Loomis, pp. 156-7), and some of them at least have "the familiar trait of increasing in strength till noon attributed to them" (*ib.* p. 154).

Other analogies too can be traced. For the Grail can change its geographical location; and we are told that "like Perceval in *Perlesvaus*, Galaad after achieving the adventures of the Grail in the mainland castle sails out to sea to become King of an *island*, *whither the Grail is transferred*" (Loomis, p. 325). So, in the *Zamyād Yasht* (§§ 56, 59 and 62) we find that on three several occasions "the Glory fled away, the Glory changed its seat, and an arm of the sea *Vouru-Kasha* was produced". An equally interesting parallelism is to be noted in connection with the *Siege Perilous* which "brings down upon him who is unworthy to sit in it a fiery fate" (Loomis, pp. 223-4). The unworthy one who tries to sit on it is blasted by



lightning, while arrows and swords rain upon him. Mr. Loomis interprets this seat as the one destined for the Young *Sun* and lightning god. In this connection, it is remarkable that in the *Mihir Yasht* the chariot of Mithra moves forward containing thousands of arrows, spears, swords and maces (§§ 128-132), which keep falling on the heads of evil beings. There are however seats in this car for the friends and allies of Mithra like the angels Rashnu, Chista and Atar (fire). But there is no seat in the car for ordinary mortals. Rather the prayer goes up from these latter : “ Oh ! may we never fall across the rush of the angry lord ” when he is driving in his chariot drawn by four heavenly steeds. Curiously enough this prayer is repeated thrice (§§ 69, 98, 135), after descriptions of the chariot of Mithra. In the *Parzival* by Wolfram and in the *Conte del Graal* by Crestien de Troyes, the perilous seat is represented by a Marvellous Bed ; but, strangely enough, that bed is described as *having wheels under it*. This brings the Siege Perilous very near indeed to the chariot of Mithra.

One admires the learning and ingenuity of such writers on the topic of the Holy Grail as J. L. Weston, Dr. Nutt and Dr. Nitze. One may also add, in all humility, that they are on the right track in seeking the explanation of the legend of the Holy Grail in the Ritual Theory, as also in the teaching and in the rites of initiation of some ancient and pre-Christian Mystery. But one's surprise is all the greater on finding that they choose to concentrate their attention on the

mysteries of Adonis or of Eleusis while ignoring the great Mithraic Cult, which undoubtedly dominated ancient Britain and Gaul—*i.e.* the lands of the nativity of the cult of the Grail—as well as other Roman provinces. There can be no question that in each of the provinces, there must have been thousands on thousands of initiations into the Mithraic mysteries—initiations far outnumbering those into the cults of Adonis or Eleusis, at least so far as Western Europe was concerned. This is an undoubted and most important fact, and weighed against it “the tradition that the deities worshipped alike by the Irish and the Welsh were of Greek origin” sinks to the level of a mere surmise. We know further that Europe when it accepted Christianity retained many features of Mithraism—including even the Christmas day which was the birthday of Mithra. The memory of such borrowings from Mithraic beliefs might well account for the perplexing “elucidation” attributed to Master Blihis or Bleheris that

“ It is of the Grail of which none should  
“ Tell or recount the secret ;  
“ For such a thing might arise  
“ Ere that the tale was all told  
“ [Or ; For the tale, ere it was fully told,  
“ Might stir up that by which]  
“ That men might be grieved thereby  
“ Who yet had not transgressed

\*

\*

\*

“ For if master Blihis lie not,  
“ None should tell the secret ”.



It is obvious that these lines refer to the persecution by the Church which would be provoked if any avowedly Mithraic mysteries were practised. The Mithraic mysteries, supplemented by other beliefs about the Royal Glory, can solve most of the problems relating to the Quest of the Holy Grail. The quest of the Source of Life will be found to be a part of the cult of the Royal Glory which is Mithra's chief attribute ; for the Glory can " smite away all plagues and endow one with a man's strength, a camel's strength, a horse's strength " (Zamyād Yasht, §§ 67-68) ; and " through it living creatures may keep away hunger and death " (*ib.* § 69). Then, again in the Mithraeums, we have Mithra armed *with the lance and the sword* (Forrer, *Das Mithra—Heiligtum von Königshofen*, p. 114). We have also sculptures of Mithraic communion feasts ; and we actually possess broken *dishes, cups* and other vessels used formerly at the Mystery-feasts of Mithra. There we may be actually visualising one of those " central dishes of the ritual feast " with which it has been sought to identify the Holy Grail.

THE IDEALS OF THE ROUND TABLE ARE  
THOSE OF MITHRAISM

It may be noted that the ethics, the spirit and the ideals of the Round Table of Arthur's romance are the same as those of Mithraism. For one thing, *loyalty to the King* and obedience to him formed an important part of the teaching of Mithraism, and it hardly need be added that such loyalty formed a most important element in the idea of the Round Table.



As F. Cumont has put it: "The absolute faithfulness to the oath must have formed one of the most important virtues of a religion of soldiers (Mithraism) whose first act on being enrolled in an army consisted in swearing obedience and devotion to the leader" (*Die Orientalischen Religionen in Römischen Heidentum*, p. 179). Another aspect of Mithraism which must have been important in framing the idea of a Round Table was that the members of a Mithraic association were to each other as brothers and sons of a common father. As Cumont goes on to say, this idea might or might not have been as broad and comprehensive as that of Christian Charity which is universal. But in any case what was a Round Table in its essence but a *brotherhood of soldiers*? To quote the same author once more, "the brotherliness of the initiates who received the designation of 'soldiers' was nearer in its character to the comradeship which is usual in a regiment than to the love of one's neighbour".

After the notions of devotion to the King and of soldierly brotherhood, other basic ideas of the Round Table of Arthur were those of *purity* and *Knightly celibacy*. As Prof. Sir John Rhys has put it, the legends of the Grail have the central ethical "idea of glorifying the hero of chastity" (*Arthurian Legend* p. 173), and that it is the solar heroes like Gwalchmei, Peredur and Owen that possess this virtue preeminently. Well might the learned professor wonder whence this idea of continence and chastity found its way into ancient Welsh literature. But the idea of

physical and moral purification was never so well-developed as in Mithraism. In the words of Dr. Farnell "no religion of the world has placed itself so perfectly in the service of ideals of purification" as Mithraism. (Farnell, *Evolution of Religion*, p. 127). Cumont has emphasised even more the ideals of purity and celibacy as exemplified in Mithraism: "This perfect purity distinguished the Persian mysteries from those of all other oriental gods. Serapis is the brother as well as the consort of Isis; Attis is loved by Cybele; each Baal of Syria is tied to a wife—Mithra lives alone, Mithra is chaste, Mithra is holy. And in the place of the worship of the fertility of Nature a new worship is erected—that of Continence" (Cumont, *op. cit.* p. 181). Need we point out that knightly continence and celibacy are the chief virtue which Arthur devoutly *attempted* to inculcate into his Round Table? Thus, the Grail is always borne by a maiden, and in the castle of Maidens we find that "the Fairy Castle has become a nunnery" (Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, p. 263). Be it noted also that the Iranian Dualism, which lies behind Mithraism, supplies the motive for the formation of Round Tables of which the knights are vowed to attack Evil and all its forms on Earth.

It might also be added that it was in the power of Mithraism to furnish those isles of the blest—those Avallons or "Lands Overseas" required for heroes like Arthur to rest after their labours. While, to the followers of Serapis, the place of the blessed was somewhere underground and in the depths of the Earth,



the Mithraist avoided these dark dominions and followed the soul to the islands of light in the planetary and stellar spheres, where it could rest after throwing off the fardels of senses and passions (Cumont, *op. cit.* p. 183). Similarly, when Mithraism entered China under the name of Amidism, it contributed to the Chinese religion the beautiful ideal of the "Paradises of the West". The Chinese name is significant because the land when Mithraism had its birth (Iran) lay to the west of China.

(b) THE ADONIS THEORY

Miss Weston has advanced the hypothesis, in her admirably written *Quest of the Holy Grail*, that "the secret of the Holy Grail is to be found in the ceremony of initiation of the cult of Adonis or Tammuz. The theory explains the presence of weeping women in the Grail legends, while the Grail itself is interpreted as the central dish of the ritual feast of Adonis. The wasting of the land is also explained by the waning powers of the Sun in autumn and winter—as also the Maimed King and the Dead Knight on the altar in the chapel" (*ib.* p. 89). "The Vase or Cup and the Lance are however difficult to explain on this hypothesis, and hence a phallic significance is attempted to be ascribed to them" (*ib.* p. 90).

The ingenuity with which the theory has been expounded is however fully equalled by the difficulties in the way of the hypothesis. It is not proved at all that the cult of Adonis was markedly prevalent in the countries in which the Grail Cult was popular



in the Middle Ages. Miss Weston is constrained to quote the opinion of a single authority, and to observe that "Vellay is clearly of opinion that, at a certain stage of development, the Adonis ritual assumed the character of a mystery" (*Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 86).

But much more evidence would be required before we can accept the prevalence of the Adonis mystery in the lands in which the Grail *saga* prevailed later. Thus Sir James Frazer when speaking of the adaptation by the Christian Church of some features of the Adonis cult observes as follows:—"But this adaptation probably took place in the Greek-speaking rather than in the Latin-speaking parts of the ancient world; for the worship of Adonis, while it flourished among the Greeks, appears to have *made little impression on Rome and the West*" (*Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, Vol. I, p. 306). Some of the available evidence goes indeed to show that even where the cult of Adonis existed it was only as an ancillary to Mithraism. Thus Dr. R. Forrer notes that in the Mithraeums, Attis often appears among the deities in the following of Mithra (*Das Mithra, Heiligtum von Königshofen*, Stuttgart, 1915, p. 48). This shows that the cult of Adonis enjoyed only a minor importance compared to that of Mithra even where it existed in Europe. In a sense, indeed, Adonis was only a form of Sol Invictus or Mithra; for Adonis is identified directly with Attis and indirectly with the Sun (cf. Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*,

Vol. I, pp. 118 and 137). Miss Weston attaches great weight to Vellay's views ; but more recently Dr. T. G. Pinches has disputed the motion of Vellay about regarding Tammuz or Adonis as a martyr god dying for the good of mankind. Rather his death is due to " the evil influences of the spouse of Nergal, the god of battle, distress and untimely death" (*ERE*, Vol. XII, p. 191).

It might also be noted, that the whole spirit of the cult of Adonis was quite different from that of the Grail legends. Weeping women and imprisoned maidens do indeed play a part in the latter ; but the main feature consists of the knightly and manly exploits of heroes like Perceval, Gawain and Arthur. This spirit is very similar to that of Mithraism which has been noted as a particularly virile religion by Cumont and others. It is indeed remarkable how clearly the Mihir Yasht presupposes the existence of a Knightly order. In section 11 of that liturgy, Mithra is described as one " whom the horsemen worship on the back of their horses, begging swiftness for their teams, health for their own bodies and that they may watch with full success those who hate them, smite down their foes and destroy at one stroke their adversaries." On the other hand the Syrian cults which came to Rome were dominated by goddesses like Atargatis or Astarte and *Dea Syria* (Cumont, *Orientalischen Religicnen*, p. 120). Moreover, while both Mithraism and the Grail Cult place the highest value on continence and Knightly celibacy, the Syrian



cults were notoriously lax in this respect. If we give a phallic interpretation to the Spear, the Cup and the "drops of blood", we are surely going against the very spirit of the Grail cult even though we may be correctly describing the dramas relating to the nuptials of Anatolian deities (cf. Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*, II, 30). On the other hand, "It was in the religion of Mithra that chastity became more than a mere ceremonial prescription and entered into the spiritual side of life" (Dr. J. B. Carter in *ERE*, III, 497). Finally, Mr. A. E. Waite has also pointed out very pertinently that "the rites of Adonis cannot explain a mystery which knows nothing of a dead or risen god".

What merit the Adonis theory possesses consists in its ability to explain the Dead Knight lying on the bier in the chapel, the Weeping Women, the Vase and the "drops of blood". But it is not as if these motifs were absent from the Kai Khusrau legend in the Iranian epic. They are all met with as preliminaries to the "Vengeance quest" or "Feud" carried on by that central figure of the Iranian epic. Thus the Knightly body found on the bier forms a riddle in the legend of Perceval, and we cannot even guess what its true significance is. But in the "Vengeance quest" of Kai Khusrau, it can be made to correspond with the dead body of the father of that prince (Siyāwash) with whose death the vendetta starts. Consequently, the presentation of the dead Knight's body on the bier forms a very necessary preliminary



to the Vengeance quest. This is indeed an important matter to note, since it forms the natural starting point of the "Vengeance quest" alike of Perceval and of Kai Khusrau. So also the "drops of blood" in the Grail Saga correspond to the drops of blood of Siyāwash, which fell on the ground as his throat was being cut by the orders of the Turanian King. Those drops of blood were indeed miraculous in character, since vegetation of a character most beneficial to mankind grew up where they fell. To quote Firdausi :

بساعت گیاهی از آن خون برست      جز ایزد که داند که آن چون برست  
 گیاه را دهم من کنونت نشان      که خوانی و را خون اسیاوشان  
 بسی فایده خلق را هست از وی      که هست آن گیا اصلش از خون اوی

There is also the parallel myth in Mithraism that vegetation grows on earth as Mithra sacrifices the bull and the blood of the latter fertilises the ground. In these ways the Iranian tradition, whether Mithraic or epic, fully accounts for the "drops of blood", which form such an important feature of the Grail Cult. Finally, even "the Weeping Women" are accounted for in the Iranian epic, though in the Grail narratives they remain a mystery. For, when Siyāwash is slain, his wife (the mother of Kai Khusrau) wept bitterly not only because her husband was slain but for another important reason as well. For the Turanian King was afraid that if the child which was then in her womb were born it would avenge its murdered father. He therefore ordered her to be dragged about and beaten in the hope that the embryo

might be destroyed. However, his wicked wish was not realized, and Kai Khusrau was born to pursue successfully that "Vengeance quest" which the Turanian King had dreaded so much.

Now we see how the Iranian legend helps us to interpret the vision in "the *Perilous Chapel*" which is found in many of the Grail romances. There in the chapel is found the dead Knight on the bier and there again are the Weeping Women. We have also the "outburst of grief which accompanies the appearance of the Lance". All these *motifs* appear at the very beginning of the Grail romances; and the Iranian epic tells us why. King Kai Khusrau was taken to a *fire temple* and made to swear eternal revenge on the Turanian King :

چو بشنید ازو شهریار جوان      سوی آتش آورد روی و روان  
بزنهار در دست رستم نهاد      چنین عهد و سوگند و این رسم و داد

Naturally, in that temple when vowing vengeance, he would recall to his mind the body of his murdered father and his mother weeping over the latter. Such visions are obviously the best preparation and starting points for the "Vengeance quest", alike in the *Shāh-nāme* and in the Grail romance. Only in the former, however, we have the *rationale* of such visions fully brought out.

#### (c) THEORY CONCERNING THE MYSTERIES OF ELEUSIS AND OF SAMOTHRACE

The high authority of Dr. Nitze might be cited for tracing the origins of the Grail Legend to the



Eleusinian mysteries. But Miss Weston has already pointed out the weak point in that theory which over-emphasises the fact of the "uncle-and-nephew" relation subsisting between Perceval and the Grail King (Weston, *Quest*, pp. 128-131). It might be added that in the Grail Legend we have hardly any one corresponding to Iacchos who plays such a great part in the Eleusinian mysteries and who is the father, son and spouse of Persephone. Moreover, as Mr. E. A. Waite has argued, "the rapture and restoration of Persephone are foreign to a Cycle of Romance in which no goddess figures" (Waite, *op. cit.* pp. 6-7). We also know some of the features of the Eleusinian mysteries, *e. g.*, "the transfer of sacred objects from the basket to the box and from the box to the basket"; and to these the Grail Legend affords no parallels (*ERE*, IX, 78). On the other hand, the numerous Solar heroes of the Grail legend seem to have had no counterpart in the Eleusinian mysteries so far as they are known.

Mr. Loomis, in his valuable study of *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, would have us resort to the mysteries of Samothrace and cults of Crete to find the origins of the Grail Legend (Loomis, *op. cit.* pp. 285-295). Before venturing to offer a few remarks on this theory, it might be remarked that owing to that *Theocrasia* (the tendency to consider as identical divinities with the same or similar characteristics) which was so prevalent in India, Egypt and Greece in antiquity, it is difficult to keep apart the cults of Adonis, of Eleusis and of Samothrace (Legge, *op. cit.*



I, 15; Dyer, *Gods in Greece*, pp. 73-74 and 178-9). Thus Demeter and Persephone are "regarded as one, being so filled with mutual love"; Attis is identified with Dionysos, Adonis, Osiris and the Sun. Further, Attis, Adonis and Dionysos are "represented as of both sexes" and cannot be kept very clearly apart from goddesses. Thus the Adonis theory and the Samothrace theory of the origins of the Grail Legend tend to merge into each other, and arguments against the one tell against the other also.

Moreover there is little proof of the existence of the cults of Demeter and Kore in ancient Britain, except a remark of Strabo, who, as a philosophic observer, might well have shared the tendency to *theocrasia* or to the identification of classical and local goddesses. It might well be asked whether any "Kabeireion" has been excavated or found in England or France? With the absence of any such "Kabeireion" in these regions we might contrast the presence of hundreds of Mithraeums in the same region. Moreover, the names and functions of the chief gods of the Samothracian cult—like (Axio) Keros, (Axio) Kersa and Eros would have to be brought into the general framework of the Grail Legend (cf. *ERE*, IX, 79). Needless to say they are conspicuous by their absence in that legend.

### (c) THE FOLK-LORE THEORY

The hypotheses regarding the Mithraic origins of the Arthurian and the Grail Cycles solve another great and baffling problem—why should the (apparent-

ly) Welsh legends of Arthur and of the Holy Grail receive such wide and enthusiastic acceptance not only in Armorica but over France and Germany? It is Cumont—the greatest authority on Mithraism—who has pointed out that among all Oriental cults none has possessed such a strong and compact a system as Mithraism—none that has such a moral elevation or such power to captivate hearts and souls. He adds that the Iranian Dualism working through Mithraism has given to Europe ideas which are still active and influential. A knowledge of that great offensive and defensive power, which this great *savant* ascribes to Iranian religion and tradition, might well prepare us to find its influence both in the cult of the Holy Grail and in the *saga* of Arthur. The lands in which Mithraism flourished, most under the Roman Empire, would have their folk-lore saturated by Mithraic conceptions and their allied ideas; and it is there that we might expect and find warm welcome to, and a rapid efflorescence of, the *sagas* of the Holy Grail and of the Round Table. Allowance, of course, will have to be made for the existence of patrons of poetic versions such as Philip of Flanders and Joanna of Flanders as well as for the attitude of the local ecclesiastical authorities. To that extent there is undoubtedly truth in the Folk-lore theory of the Holy Grail. Only, it may be noted that, such folk-lore might have behind it half-forgotten traditions of that Mithraism which flourished for centuries over great portions of Europe. The Folk-lore theory does not in



any way contradict the theory that has been put forward in these pages. For Mithraism had formed important syntheses with local beliefs and cults, and was thus enabled to survive, in some way, the great persecution that broke upon it after the death of its last patron—Julian (Forrer, *op. cit.* 128). Thus, there was a synthesis of Mithra with the Celtic god Merdos or Mars Halamarthus (*ib.* 110). So also the Celtic god Medru has been supposed to be a Celticised form of Mithra (*ib.* pp. 110 and 127). The great prevalence and the surviving influence of Mithraism in parts of Gaul and in Roman Germany is thus rendered understandable. Eminent authorities believe that the Church directed its persecution against Mithraism much earlier than against Paganism in general. For it had to reckon with the many followers of the latter in the army. But, as it happened, Mithraism managed to survive, at least partially, by effecting syntheses with local cults of gods and by thus entering the local folk-lore. Thus, besides the Celtic god Merdos, we have a god called Cissonius who is mentioned in a Mithraeum (*ib.* pp. 49 and 88). There are eminent scholars, like Prof. Sir John Rhys and Dr. Alfred Nutt, who connect Arthur and other heroes with Celtic gods and culture-heroes. It is not unlikely that through such developments, the Mithraic tradition might have made itself felt in the field of medieval European romance, since Mithra had secured for himself quite a number of “doppel-gangers” in the form of Celtic gods.



Finally, neither the Folk-lore theory nor the Ritual theory can account for the connection of the Grail Legend with the Legend of King Arthur. Even such an early authority as Robert de Borron found great difficulty in combining the Grail and Arthur themes. Some believe that Robert de Borron had himself combined the Grail saga and the Arthur saga, others that he had found them already combined in some Latin source. Another view is that it was left to Chrestien de Troyes to unite the two sagas (cf. Baumgartner, *Geschichte der Weltliteratur*, Vol. V, p. 98). But if our theory of the Grail being identical with the Royal Glory is accepted, there will be no difficulty in explaining the connection. For, in the Iranian legends, which doubtless accompanied Mithraism into ancient Britain, we have the common parentage of the Arthurian Cycle and the Quest of the Holy Grail. The presence and importance of Arthur in both the Cymric and Welsh traditions are accounted for, since the Iranian legends, in which Kai Khusrau and his Round Table figured so largely, were extremely likely to influence the lands where Mithraism had secured for generations such an important footing. For, the garrisons, which manned the Walls of Severus and Hadrian, contained a great many devotees of Mithraism. We note in particular that Mithraic monuments and descriptions are to be found in ancient Britain in the forts near the Vallum in Northern Britain and at Caerleon-on-Usk or York.

POINTS OF GEOGRAPHICAL CONTACT BETWEEN CELTIC  
AND MITHRAIC PRIESTHOODS

We have just seen how the various Mithræa, scattered over Britain, Gaul and Belgium, would introduce the Celtic race to the Mithraic and Iranian traditions. In Great Britain, not only the Roman walls but numerous places like London, Chester, Rutchester, Otterburn-Tower—to mention but a few—have been found to have contained Mithræa. So also in France, Belgium and Roman Germany, Mithra worship had spread.

But this was not the only way in which the Celtic race was brought into contact with Mithraism and the Iranian traditions. Thus the late M. Henri Hubert, Director of Studies at the Ecole des Hautes-Etudes, has emphasised the fact that the whole Celtic world—spread from Ireland at one end to Asia Minor on the other—“was in communication, was inter-connected, must have had resemblances.” This solidarity of the Celtic peoples was explained to a considerable extent by the common and all-pervading institution of Druidism. It was a truly international institution, and the Celts “owed to these professional teachers moral ideas, conceptions about the future life, mythological traditions, ritual practices and legal solutions which they all had in common” (Hubert, *The Greatness and Decline of the Celts*, pp. 187-188). Similarly, Dr. J. A. MacCulloch has shown that the Council of 300 men called *drunemeton*, which used to meet in Galatia in Asia Minor, was a council of



**Druids.** Dr. MacCulloch also draws attention to a quotation of Diogenes Laertius from Aristotle in which the existence of Druids in Galatia was asserted. Thus, there are proofs that the Druids, who had spread from Ireland on the one hand to Asia Minor on the other, were in communication with each other and were thus in a position to imbibe Eastern mythology and cults as well as religious beliefs and traditions. In fact, such an international institution as the Druids, with a chain of colonies from Asia to the Atlantic, would form an excellent medium for the conveyance of Oriental beliefs and cults to the farthest limits of the Western world.

We know also that from the time of the Achæmean Kings downwards, there were important *Magian* colonies in Asia Minor ; and thus the two priesthoods—the Magians and the Druids—would come into direct contact with one another. This would greatly facilitate the passing over of Iranian traditions into Celtic lands like Britain and Gaul. We are further aware of what an important part Asia Minor had played as one of the cradles of Mithraism. This would show how Mithraic traditions would enter Celtic beliefs long before the advent of the Roman Empire.

We are thus prepared for the various analogies between the Celtic and Indo-Iranian cultures which have been pointed out by scholars like the late Henri Hubert and M. Vendryes (in the *Memoires de la Societe de linguistique, Paris*). As M. Hubert has observed “nothing could be liker to the Druids than



earth owned by the Asuras (*Taittirīya Samhita* VI. 2, 4) and over Ambrosia which Cusna, the Asura, had seized. This latter meant of course that the conflict was about Royalty or Royal Glory. It is this combination of all desirable objects—spiritual as well as material—which gives its characteristic lustre and poetic potentialities alike to the Grail and the Glory or *Hvarenō*.

Incidentally, it might be pointed out that another excellent Iranian parallel to the “churning” of the ocean is to be found in the Farvardin Yasht (§ 65), where the Fravashis are described as bringing out of the ocean not only water but also the *Hvarenō*, which is the talisman at once of prosperity, royalty and abundance.

The “quest” is, as we have seen, not only for Ambrosia and for Royal Power, but for *wealth* as personified by *Çri* or by Lakshmi. Thus, in the Ashi Yasht, Ashi, who is the Goddess of Fortune and Wealth, thus speaks of the quest for her in which the Iranian Naotaras and the Turanians joined: “The Turanians and the swift-horsed Naotaras clapping their hands, *ran after me*.” So, the Asuras, who stole Amrita, also demanded Lakshmi, both of which had been obtained by churning the ocean in harmony, in the first instance. As Fausboll has stated, the war between the Devas and the Asuras was “a struggle for the mastery of the three worlds and for the imperial power.” From the beginning, *Çri*, the goddess of prosperity, lived with the Asuras but forsook them later on (*Indian Mythology*, pp. 39-41). It need scarcely be

added that both Lakshmi and Ashi were prosperity personified (Ashi Yasht, §§ 6-15). This is another aspect of the Grail, which is not only the source of spiritual life but a food-supplying vessel or the Cornucopia of general abundance. Moreover, we should remember that "the Grail was wrought of fine gold, and adorned with precious stones" (Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, p. 154). Thus in the Vedas and the Indian epics, the Devas and the Asuras are rivals in the quest for power, plenty and prosperity, just as in the Zamyād Yasht, as we have seen, the Divine powers and the powers of Evil strive for the Royal Glory throwing darts at each other.

So far as the idea of a merely food-supplying vessel goes, we have got another parallel in the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata. There King Yudhishtira prays from the waters to the Sun to supply him with the means of feeding his following of Brāhmanas. The Sun responds by bestowing on him a copper vessel which provides food for him and his whole following for five or seven years together.\*

(b) THE "CUP" AS THE CHIEF INSTRUMENT OF SACRIFICE

Both in the Yashts and the Vedas, the conflict between the Devas and the Asuras is carried out by means of *sacrifices*. Thus, in the *Taittirīya Samhita*, the Devas conquered the Asuras by the Abhyātāna Sacrifice (T. S. iii. 4.6) and rites of the ten nights (T. S. vii. 2.5), fifteen nights (T. S. vii 3.7) and twenty-one

---

\* This analogue was kindly pointed out to me by Prof. A. B. Gajendragadkar, M.A.



nights (T. S. vii. 3.9). So, in the Yashts like the Ābān Yasht, Gosh Yasht and Rām Yasht, the Aryan princes of ancient Irān offer sacrifices to various deities for success against their non-Aryan foes, and the refrain arises that "I may be as constantly victorious as any one of all the Aryans" (Bahram Yasht, § 60).

*A propos* of these sacrifices, an analogue might be suggested for the "cup", which played such an important part both in the Grail Legend and in the legends of Kai Khusrau. For, in course of ceremonies, the gods or Devas drew the various cups, *e. g.* the Upāmsu cup (T. S. vi. 4.6), the Āgrayana cup (T. S. vi. 4.11) and the Ukthya cup (T. S. vi. 5.1). These were sacrificial cups of great potency; and they did "test veracity" as required both by Celtic and Iranian tradition, since the Devas won the conquest through their superior regard for truth and spiritual laws. We have narrated how in the hands of King Kai Khusrau, his famous cup showed the marvels of the whole world and tested the veracity of heroes. The importance of the Cup or the Chalice in the legend of the Holy Grail need hardly be emphasised. There, however, the idea of sacrifice is replaced by the closely connected notion of a spiritual struggle characterised by holiness and asceticism; and in connection with this aspect of the Grail Legend, we have to bear in mind the modifications received by the legend since the introduction of Christianity.

(c) THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRE IN THE CELTIC AND  
INDO-IRANIAN LEGENDS

Let us pass on to *Agni*, who played an important



part in the "quest" both in the Indian and in the Iranian version. Thus, Agni was the champion of the Devas and it was with his help that they overcame the Asuras (T. S. vi. 3. 10 and T. S. vi. 2. 2). If the Devas succeeded in their struggle with the Asuras through sacrifice, Agni is the sacrificer *par excellence* "and he serves as the model for sacrificers" (Keith, *op. cit.* p. 159). In the Zamyād Yasht, too, when "the Good spirit and the Evil one did struggle with one another" for the Royal Glory on the supra-mundane plane, Ātar (the deity of fire) played a great part in the conflict. He wanted to seize the Glory. But he and his opposite number Azi (the dragon) were evenly matched, and "each took back his hand, as the instinct of life prevailed" (§§ 48 and 50). That Glory was at last seized by Apām Napāt. Now, as both Spiegel and Darmesteter have shown, Apām Napāt is "the fire-god born from the cloud in the lightning"; while Sir A. B. Keith observes "Apām Napāt is the same god as Agni" (Keith, *op. cit.* p. 136). Hence the final honours did go to the deity of fire. Correspondingly, in the Grail Legend, we have many of the heroes, like Galaad (Galahad) who secured the Grail, wearing garments of a *fiery* description. Thus, Galaad wears "red arms and a coat of red sendal, and later, it is interpreted as *the color of fire*" (Loomis, *op. cit.* p. 216 quoting from H. O. Sommer, *Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, VI, 57). Similarly, the knight Boors is "clad in a robe of vermeil samite." Further, the hero Lug, who was the prototype of Lancelot, "was

of a red colour from evening till morning and whose face shone as the sun ". Thus, the leading knights of the Round Table are shown to be heroes, who are closely related to the element of fire.

(d) 'THE BASIS OF POLITICAL OBLIGATION

The Indian and Iranian mythologies also agree in attempting to find a basis for political obligation in the ideas of the " Quest ". For, it is through Prajāpati, who at once symbolises and devises sacrifice that the Devas triumph over the Asuras. Proceeding further, we find that Kingship is explained by the fact that Kings represent Prajāpati (Keith, *op. cit.* pp. 471 and 481). So, in the Avesta, it is Mithra, who can bestow the Royal Glory, or, at his will, divert it from nations " who delight in havoc " (Mihir Yasht, § 27). As in Iranian legends so in Indian ones, Mitra enjoys the attributes of sovereignty or *Kshatra* and he is pre-eminently designated as " the ruler ". Similarly also, in the legend of the Holy Grail, as related by Wau-chier de Denain, the Fisher-King carries the Grail with him wherever he goes (Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, p. 23), and it is at the end of his adventures (relating to the Grail) that Perceval is hailed by the King as his heir. Thus the Grail is, like the Glory, the credential of Kings.

LAKSHMI, ASHI AND GUINEVERE

Perhaps some side-light might also be thrown from Indian and Iranian mythology on the " fickleness " of Guinevere and her *liability to repeated abduction* or capture by knights like *Melwas* or *Lancelot*, *Boors*



or *Falerin*. For, the repeated abduction of Guinevere is a curiosity of mythology, which deserves to be noted. We have good authority for the legends that Mordred, Boors and Gawain were among these abductors (Loomis, p. 342, quoting Sommer IV. 310 and Chrestien). For the episodes of her abduction by Melwas and Falerin, the reader might be referred to Prof. Sir John Rhys's work on the *Arthurian Legend* (pp. 56 and 68). It is true that at present, the idea of the identity of Guinevere with Proserpine holds the field, and is backed up by very high authority. It originated with M. Gaston Paris, who saw the similarity between the rape of Proserpine by Pluto and the abduction of Guinevere by Melwas. That opinion is backed up by such authorities as Prof. Rhys, who would make of Melwas "an echo of the King of the other world." There is some difficulty, however, in splitting up even "the gloomy Dis" into so many Celtic abductors.

But the fickleness of Guinevere might be explained not only by attempting to identify her with Proserpine but with some other goddess of Aryan mythology. Thus we read in Mahābhārata (XII, 225, 228) of the "fickleness" of *Çri* or Lakshmi who "lived once with the Dānavas, then with the gods, and then with Indra" (Jacobi in *ERE*, II, 808). The goddess Lakshmi is indeed an excellent parallel for Queen Guinevere for it is said of the former: "inconstant and capricious art and thou associatest with many." She herself is made to observe that amongst the people



with whom she dwells “neither is there any god whatsoever, or gandharva to be found or Asura or rākshasa, not one who is able to bear me, O Purandara” (Fausboll, *Indian Mythology*, p. 106).

Besides Lakshmi or Çri, there is Shachi (the wife or queen of Indra) who has also points of contact with Guinevere. For her very name signifies greatness, and she is the consort of any one who succeeds to the position and greatness of Indra.

So, in the Yasht pertaining to the goddess Ashi, who is the Iranian counterpart of Çri or Lakshmi, she is represented as quite impartial as between the Turanians, who are synonymous in the Avesta with the Dānus or Dānavas, and the Iranians, as represented by the Naotaras.\* In the Astād Yasht, she is made almost an aspect of Royal Glory; for power and abundance come to the King when “she (Ashi) comes in, inside his fine royal palace” (§ 4).

Now the queen of Arthur, Guinevere, represented both beauty and Royal fortune—which are also the common characteristics of Çri or Lakshmi and Ashi. Moreover, since it has been shown “that the English *Sir Percyvalle* represents queen Guinevere with a golden cup” which was a form both of the Grail and of the Cornucopia, that is an additional feature of resemblance between Arthur’s queen and the goddess

---

\* Here we find a very important point of contact between the cults of Ashi and of Çri. For the latter was pursued by the Turanians, while the latter “lived with the Dānavas”. Both in the Ābān Yasht (§ 73) and Farvardin Yasht (§ 38), the Dānus (Dānavas) are identified with the Turanians.

of fortune (Loomis, p. 229 and *Modern Philology*, Vol. XXII, 92-5). Finally, if Guinevere was abducted, not by Lancelot alone, as in later forms of the Arthurian legend, but by other Knights like Boors and Gawain Mordred and Melwas or even Kei (Loomis, 342 ; Prof. Sir John Rhys, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 56-60), that is an additional reason in favour of the hypothesis that Guinevere represents the fickle goddess of Fortune. The abduction of Guinevere is not seasonal as is that of Proserpine, nor is it due to the same gloomy personality as in the case of Proserpine. We may grant with Prof. Rhys that Melwas or Moroio was "an echo of the Aryan myth regarding the King of the Other World." But the same cannot be asserted of all other captors of Guinevere. Nor can we disregard the other and even more important Aryan myth of the apparent fickleness of the goddess of Fortune. That other myths than those of Proserpine can throw light on the problem of Guinevere and her captors is borne out by Miss J. L. Weston's suggestion that the story of *The Three Days' Tournament* "gave the initial suggestion for the immortal loves of Lancelot and Guinevere" (*Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 67-68).

After all, we can trust the old bards to know their business and not to spoil their epic by making an ordinary wanton the heroine of their works. Nor is it only the Arthurian legend in which a Guinevere figures. Thus, in the epic of Cuchulainn, the lady Morrighu transfers her regard from an older to a youn-



ger sun-hero (Rhys, *Hibbert Lectures* of 1886, pp. 468-471 and *Arthurian Legend*, pp. 111-112). The bards knew well that figures like Guinevere and Morgu symbolised *Fortune which is ever unstable* by its nature, and that such transfer of regard involves no disgrace for either side, though it may often be the harbinger of great tragedies.

Hitherto the exponents of the Arthurian legend have been apologetic when they approach the topic of Guinevere's character. Thus Prof. Rhys in his admirable study begins his chapter on the Queen by quoting an old rhyme which has perpetuated her unpopularity, and then he proceeds to ask—"How did Guinevere acquire her notoriety?" But, according to the view propounded here, there is nothing disgraceful to be explained away. If Arthur is the Solar or Culture hero and the Grail is the Royal Glory, Guinevere is the Royal fortune. As every one knows Royal fortune ("Rāja Lakshmi" to use the Sanskrit equivalent) is never stable and always passes from one favourite to another. To say that Guinevere's infidelity led to the catastrophe of Camlan is only to observe that the good fortune of Arthur deserted him before the battle. Dr. Nutt's dictum that such a person as Guinevere "might woo without forfeiting womanly modesty in virtue of her goddesshood" supports the thesis put forward here.

#### CAUSES OF THE GREATER DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULT OF ROYAL GLORY IN IRAN

But while, as shown above, the essentials of the



cult of the Royal Glory (*Hvarenō*) are to be found in the Vedas and in the Indian epics, that cult attained greater prominence and importance in ancient Irān than in old India; and a number of reasons might be assigned for this difference. In the first place, there can be no doubt that Dualism played a less important part in the sphere of Hinduism than in the Iranian religions. The opposition of *Devas* and *Asuras* forms no doubt a sort of Dualism, but not such as to prevent the Indian philosopher from "regarding the world as a single whole animated by one spirit". In fact the Indian mind was inclined to accept Monism on the whole; while "a tendency towards dualistic conceptions, or, perhaps, we may say, towards bilateral symmetry, seems to be an essential characteristic of the Iranian mind" (Casartelli). And it is in this eternal warfare between Good and Evil that we find the basis of the various "quests" including the quest of the Grail or Glory. For, the powers of Good and Evil keep struggling for domination and sovereignty of this world. Sometimes this sovereignty or the kingdom of this world passes to the powers of Evil; and correspondingly in a striking passage of the Gospels, Satan is described as "the Prince of this world." But the followers of the good side also make it their business to engage persistently in the "quest" of this Royal Glory and to win it back for their side. Hence the exploits of heroes of the Round Tables of Kai Khusrau, or of Arthur, for the Royal Glory or the Holy Grail.

Then, again, neither the cult of *Prajāpati* (who

was the prototype of royalty) nor that of Mitra (the possessor of the attributes of sovereignty or *Kshatra* and the independent and universal ruler of *Samraj*) found a proper development in India. If, indeed, the cult of Prajāpati did find increased acceptance, it was not on the side of political significance, but on the metaphysical side, as one in whom the cosmological and pantheistic views of the more reflective section of the priesthood found their expression" (Keith, *op. cit.* p. 101). Later on, he became "the artificer of gods" (A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 118). Mitra too remained in course of time "little but a name." Perhaps this decline of the importance of the older deities was due to "the admixture of races", as Sir A. B. Keith has suggested. But, even from the start, Mitra kept losing his individuality to Varuna with whom he was constantly associated and "had hardly an independent trait left" (A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 27). This decline of the cult of Mitra was made up for, to a certain extent, by the growth in the importance of Indra, who became the helper of the Aryans against the Panis, and other non-Aryan foes and gave their lands to the Aryans.

Far different was the development of the cult of Mithra in Irān. As the god of light, of truth and of good faith, he was sure of commanding special devotion in the land of Dualism. As Prof. Jackson has noted, "the Greek writers regard him as a typical Persian divinity". His cult, reinforced by accretions from Babylonia and Asia Minor, spread over the Roman



Empire. Even before that, Mithra had occupied an equally high position in the age of the later Achaemenids, and under the Parthian Kings, while in the Near East he received adoration as "Apollo Mithras". In this way, the cult of Mithra not only grew in importance in Iran in the course of ages but dominated the Roman Empire, and doubtless carried with it into the West a great mass of Iranian tradition.

Perhaps also the followers of the Iranian religion, which was eventually historical in its outlook, found it necessary to discover some principle, which should be the convincing test of the legitimacy of the successive Aryan dynasties which ruled the land of Iran, and which should, at the same time, *stigmatize decisively as usurpers the dynasties of non-Aryan conquerors*. For we find that the Royal Glory is essentially the Glory of the Aryan race and "belongs to the Aryan nations, born and unborn" (Zamyād Yasht, § 57). Obviously, the Aryans of Irān found it a harder task to maintain their racial existence than the Aryans of India. These Iranians found it difficult to keep up their political integrity against the powerful Semitic kingdoms of Mesopotamia, on one side, and the constant incursions of Turanian nomads on the other. They were therefore anxious to produce some ruler who had "enough Royal Glory to extinguish the non-Aryan people" (Zamyād Yasht, § 68) and to "conquer the havocking hordes" (*ib.* § 54). In particular, the Royal Glory was believed to "cleave to" (*i. e.* to be the possession of) the eight



princes of the Kavi dynasty which ruled in Eastern Irān and who held at bay the Turanian invaders from the North for a long time. Among these, the greatest guardian of that Glory was Kavi Husravah (Kai Khusrau) to whom it gave power of "extermination of enemies at one stroke" (Zamyād Yasht, §§ 66-77).

Hence, in Irān, the cult of the Royal or Aryan Glory attained a height of dominance and acceptance unequalled in any country. There were no less than three cults devoted directly to the worship of that Glory—those of Mithra, Āstād and Zamyād. The "Aryan Glory" and the "Royal Glory" were held to be almost synonymous, since the Aryan race was alone conceived of as entitled to rule the world. The three cults were further supported by that of Ashi (Vanghui) or that of the god Ashi or Fortune who is made the source of all good and riches. Thus, we find in the Āstād Yasht a description of the Aryan Glory (§§ 1-3) followed immediately by that of Ashi or Fortune (§§ 3-6). Here we have a unique example of the combination of cults of Royal Glory, of Aryan Glory and of Fortune.

For these reasons, among others, the Cult of the Royal Glory failed to develop to the same extent in India as in Irān, although in the Vedas and in the Indian epics most of the essentials of the cult are to be found. Enough, however, has been said to show that these references to the cult in Indian scriptures and epics are of very great importance for the proper interpretation of the legend of the Holy Grail. It

would have been very strange, indeed, had it been otherwise ; for at the bottom of a great deal of the world's mythology lie the ancient Aryan beliefs, which give it a remarkable unity.

SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "GRAIL"  
AND THE "HVARENO" (GLORY)

While the ideas of the "Grail" or the "Hvarenō" (Royal Glory) were the highly spiritualized and poetized possessions of many branches of the Aryan race, even some backward races can be shown to be not without similar, though rudimentary, notions. As the possession of the *Hvarenō* is the justification of Royalty in ancient Irān, so in the backward races, the possession of the *Mana* was supposed to account for superior valour, military distinction or wisdom (cf. W. I. Thomas, *Primitive Behaviour*, p. 327). As Prof. W. I. Thomas has put it, there was supposed to be a diffused power of *Mana* scattered through all nature, which can be personalized in a great or wise person. The military leader of the older times—or even a great culture hero—had his supremacy and power justified by the idea that he embodied in himself this *Mana*. That *Mana* he might obtain from some god or spirit, or it might be acquired by, and manifested in, superiority of ritual. Thus in the Avesta the *Hvarenō* or Glory emanates from Mithra and deserts persons who are found wanting in virtue. In the Vedas it was the power of sacrifice and ritual which gained the Earth and Lakshmi for the Devas. In the Legend of the Holy Grail, only



an extraordinary combination of virility and chastity can obtain the Grail.

The *advantages* of the possession of such *Mana* were supposed to be most important and various. *Mana* was exhibited in persons, in power, strength, prestige, reputation, skill, dynamic personality, intelligence ; in things, in efficacy, in " luck " *i. e.* in accomplishment (W. I. Thomas, *op. cit.* p. 326). Further, the Priest-King who had the *Mana* could regulate the weather, the harvests and even the fertility of population (Thurnwald, *Die Menschliche Gesellschaft*, Vol. IV, p. 170). We are told similarly in the Zamyād Yasht that the Glory (*Hvarenō*) brings to its possessors good pastures and fine horses, plenty, beauty and weal, power and great strength (§§ 67-69) and that it keeps away hunger and death, cold and heat (§ 69). It need hardly be added that the possessor of *Çri* or Lakshmi is similarly blessed, according to the ancient Indian traditions, and that the guardian of the Holy Grail was able to give prosperity and plenty to his land. He was in the position of the primitive Divine King, who was responsible for social welfare and was supposed to command the seasons. Further, in the Iranian legends, Mithra is associated with the King as the possessor of the Glory. So, in the regulation of crops and of weather, the Sun is associated with the Priest-King who possessed the *Mana* as also in that of the world order in general (Thurnwald, *op. cit.* p. 170).

From the point of view of *political evolution*,



the notion of *Mana* has a double aspect, and has been of great importance in the transition from the stage of blood-relationship to that of political union. On the one hand, the rise of patriarchs and individual despots was facilitated by the belief in the potency of the *Mana* possessed by an individual or a family. So also, a race or a clan, which believes firmly in its superiority over its neighbours, might justify the belief on the ground of the possession of *Mana* (cf. Thurnwald, *Die Menschliche Gesellschaft*, Vol. IV, pp. 40-41). In this way the foundations of political evolution were laid. Thus A. van Gennep (in his *Tabou et totemisme a Madagascar*, p. 17) brings out the fact that at the basis of the native theory of Kingship lies the idea of *Hasina*, which is the local equivalent of *Mana*. From his coronation to his grave, the King is accompanied by his *Hasina*, which is the fundamental conception of royalty and its power. This reminds us that in the Zamyād Yasht the "Glory" is represented as cleaving to individual Iranian Kings and also as belonging to the Aryan race as a whole.

We may also note that, like the Grail and the Glory, the *Mana* has been manifested in, or attributed to, various inanimate objects. As we have seen above, both the Grail and the Glory have taken the shape of a Cup or a Stone, while the former might also appear as a Lance. The *Mana* has also been attributed among various races to spears and other implements and to weapons like clubs (W. I. Thomas, *op. cit.* p. 328). Codrington has emphasised

the fact that the power or influence designated as *Mana* " may act through the medium of water, or a stone or a bone " (*Melanesians*, p. 118 note). As long ago as the year 1862, Mr. J. F. Campbell had drawn attention to the fact that the sacred basin (the Holy Grail) and the Holy Lance, though Christianised in a later age, are manifestly the same as the Gaelic talismans " which appear so often in the Gaelic tales, and which have relations in all popular lore—the glittering weapon which destroys and the sacred medicinal cup which cures " (cf. Nutt, *Studies in the Legend of the Holy Grail*, p. 103).

Another point of resemblance between the natures of *Mana* and the *Hvarenō* might be indicated here. Thus, among the Iroquoians, *Orenda* is the entity which corresponds to *Mana*; and we are informed by Mr. Hewitt that if a warrior or the player of a game is worsted, then his *Orenda* is supposed to have been thwarted by the greater *Orenda* of his rival (*American Anthropologist*, new ser. IV 38 f). Similarly, in the *Shāhnāme*, the greater Glory (شرف) of Kai Khusrau eclipses and obliterates that of Afrāsiyāb and his son Shideh and, as a result, the two latter are defeated in battle.

These few analogies have been put forward here not as an exhaustive study but merely to show the wide range and prevalence of ideas which, though rudimentary, are still allied to those of the *Hvarenō* (Royal Glory) and the Holy Grail.



## CONCLUSION

The basic idea of some supreme Virtue or great quality—whether possessed by particular individuals or by representatives of the Aryan race—which secured earthly sovereignty as well as spiritual eminence, had developed in antiquity among several branches of the Aryan race. Thus, in the Atharva Veda, there was a great struggle between the Asuras and the Devas for the earth and its treasures, and it was decided in favour of the Devas by their possession of the *Tejas* and through the help of Agni or fire. But the notion of such sovereign Virtue or talisman was developed most in the Iranian tradition as represented by the *Mihir Yasht*, the *Zamyād Yasht* and the *Shāhnāme*h. The same idea, in a more elementary form, must have appeared among the Greeks (who found no difficulty in identifying the *Hvarenō* with *Tyche*) and among the Kelto-Germanic races. Such elementary ideas would naturally be reinforced in the West by the long domination of Mithraism, which was saturated with Iranian traditions, and by the prevalence of Mithraic mysteries. The notion of the Holy Grail was the resultant of these forces. This is shown by the following general resemblances between the Grail Cult and the Iranian tradition referred to regarding

- (a) the Nature of the Grail and the Glory,
- (b) the virtues attributed to them,
- (c) the “treasures” and “talismans” connected with the Holy Grail, and the Glory,

(d) the exploits of the heroes who pursued the quest of the Grail and the Glory, as illustrated by the "Vengeance quest", the story of the Fisher-King, the hero's acquisition of the Kingship and the "Great Fool" tale.

We have noted further points of geographical contact between the cults of Mithra and of the Holy Grail, and between the Celtic and Iranian priest-hoods.

It might be pointed out, further, that the hypothesis put forward here explains and accounts satisfactorily for such important elements of the Grail Legend as the Perceval *enfances* (pp. 65-68); and the passing of Perceval or Arthur (pp. 75-76); the position and functions of Merlin (pp. 83-84); and the Vengeance Quest (pp. 70-72). No other theory, it is submitted, can account for so many factors in the Grail Legend as the present one. Even the gaps and hiatuses of the present hypothesis are highly significant. It is freely admitted that such features as the "question" and the "processions" are not fully explained by the hypothesis suggested here. But that is obviously because we know very little of the working of the Mithraic ritual and initiation. Perhaps indeed, we shall never be in a position to know more of it, for the work of the destruction of the Mithræa has been done too thoroughly.

It is submitted on these grounds that in great measure it is to this Iranian tradition and to Mithra-



ism that we must look for the full explanation and origins of the Grail cult, and only in a minor degree and subsidiary measure to mysteries like those of Adonis or Eleusis or the cult of Samothracian goddesses. The Folk-lore theory of the Grail is no doubt true in great measure; but it does not conflict with the hypothesis put forward here, because Mithraism may be presumed to have influenced such folk-lore owing to the long and dominant position which the former held in Europe. In any case, it is upto the eminent workers on the Grail *saga* to do justice to the contribution made to it by the Iranian tradition in general and by the cults of the Royal Glory and of Mithra in particular. The Grail student has already gone far afield to all lands which received and cultivated the *Matière de Bretagne*. But he has to go even further and to study the forms which the cult of the Grail or Glory has assumed in older Aryan systems of thought and to the later modifications of these forms. This idea is exemplified by an examination of what corresponds to the quest of the Holy Grail in the Vedas and in the Indian epics; and in these texts also various items of correspondence with the incidents in the Grail legends were pointed out. Thus we found the Devas and the Asuras joining the quest for what combines the ideals of immortality, abundance and empire. We found that the myths about "churning the ocean" threw light on the "Fisher King", and on the "quest" in general, while the myths about Ashi and Lakshmi illustrated the true character of Guinevere.

Thus we found that both Iranian and Indian myths might be used to throw light on the legend of the Grail and that the ideas prevailing in ancient Irān and India on the subject were very similar indeed. This was only to be expected; for it is the ancient and central mass of Aryan tradition which lies behind, and which imparts such remarkable similarity to the Iranian traditions (in the *Shāhnāme*, the *Mihir Yasht* and the *Zamyād Yasht*), the allied Indian myths and to the Arthurian legend.

---



ALLAMA IQBAL LIBRARY



71898

K. UNIVERSITY LIB. K. DIVISION Acc. No. 71898..... Due..... 8-1-70 .....
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------



